

# Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute  
Silk Road Studies Program*



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# THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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**KEY ISSUE:** A short 75-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

**BACKGROUND:** 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

**IMPLICATIONS:** 300-450 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

**CONCLUSIONS:** 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

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Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: <scornell@jhu.edu> and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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# KAZAKHSTAN'S ELECTION PUZZLE

Rafis Abazov

*The presidential election season in Kazakhstan started with several puzzling events. In late 2010 –early 2011 a ‘group of private individuals’ came up with the idea to extend Nursultan Nazarbayev’s presidency until 2020 through a referendum rather than through open and competitive elections. However, in an unexpected twist the Constitutional Council declared the referendum unconstitutional despite the fact that about 5 million signatures were collected and both chambers of Kazakhstan’s legislature — the Senate and the Majilis — approved it. This decision led to an official announcement that early presidential elections will be held on April 3, 2011, though they are not due until 2012.*

**BACKGROUND:** The Kazakhstan presidential election campaign was officially launched on March 3 after the Central Election Committee completed the registration process and named four candidates. The ballot list on April 3 will include President Nursultan Nazarbayev, representing the Nur Otan Party; Zhambyl Ahmetbekov, representing the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan; Gani Kasymov, representing the Patriots' Party of Kazakhstan; and Mels Eleusizov, representing the Environmental Union 'Tabigat' (Nature). Many local experts believe that the outcomes of the elections are quite predictable, as polls suggest the incumbent president is well ahead of all other candidates.

Yet, these presidential elections are extremely important for the political development in Kazakhstan. It is an open secret in Astana that these elections are all about building what Kazakh expert Dosym Satbayev calls "a configuration of succession mechanism" and rules of the game for Nazarbayev's succession after his retirement. At this stage nothing indicates that President Nazarbayev will step down anytime soon. However, all members of the political establishment and especially the major competing clans would like to see clear-cut arrangements for the succession set up well

in advance. An acceptable succession mechanism implies building a fairer election process (in which all political clans have equal chances) and stronger institutions, which would help avoid the “winner takes all” scenario seen in neighboring Kyrgyzstan during its revolution in 2010.

This would probably also include the search for a compromise figure that would be prepared for his or her role as a formal or informal successor in-waiting and in-training. This person would also be delegated certain powers and responsibilities to make sure that s/he would be capable of maintaining a delicate political balance between various competing political groups and would carry on Nazarbayev's legacy of economic modernization and the vision of Kazakhstan as, in Nazarbayev's words, one of "the most economically competitive countries in the world."

The history of succession in the Central Asian region has been quite instructive and not very encouraging. For example, long-serving President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan was dishonorably chased out of office in 2005 for manipulating elections and refusing to begin the succession process. It did not help that he was considered a founding father of Kyrgyzstan, the man who led the country to



independence. His successor, Kurbanbek Bakiyev, though elected in relatively open and competitive elections, was incapable of maintaining the required balance between the political clans in the country, grabbing political power and control over most of the economic resources at the expense of his competitors. Thus, he was also disreputably chased out of office by street protestors in spring 2010 and has remained a *persona non grata* in Kyrgyzstan, accused among other things of failing to maintain political balance in the post-Akayev environment and of bringing his country to the brink of civil war. The political elite in Kazakhstan would doubtless like to avoid this sort of scenario and would prefer to build a system that would make the political process more predictable and less open to destabilization by the actions of impatient individuals.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Although some observers complain that these presidential elections are too predictable — for example, Kazakh scholar Bulat Sultanov predicts that the incumbent

president might get up to 70–75 percent of the votes — they are still very important for the political development of the country. First, these elections are conducted against the backdrop of revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa. These revolutions have wiped out several seemingly very strong regimes

and leaders who were in power for decades. Apparently, beneath the façade of stability in these countries public grievances and anger were bubbling; though in Kazakhstan the ruling establishment claims that this scenario does not apply to their country at all and would like to use these elections to show the international community that the country is stable. Second, the elections have also become a means for cementing the legitimacy of the political leadership and political elite, and current domestic and international policies, especially in the aftermath of the 2010 OSCE chairmanship.

Third, the competitive presidential elections are also designed to ameliorate the public relations disaster of the attempt to prolong Nazarbayev's presidential term until 2020 through a referendum. Several prominent leaders threw their political capital and resources behind the referendum, intensively working on it for months and then publicly supporting it. However, they seriously miscalculated the

public backlash, both domestic and international, against this unconstitutional and undemocratic action and the referendum was cancelled on February 5, 2011.

Fourth, these elections are also designed as a final showdown before the far more important and sensitive event scheduled for fall 2011, the parliamentary elections. The parliamentary elections, if conducted in an open and competitive environment, are far more unpredictable and far more significant. It seems that the configuration of political groupings along the various regional, business and clan lines will be crucial for the political environment and political discourse in this focal period. Currently, Kazakhstan's parliament is fully controlled by the ruling Nur Otan Party. Yet, even within the ruling party establishment strong disagreements exist on future policies, strategies and distribution of power.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The election campaign in Kazakhstan has heated up and it is essential that the elections become an open and fair communication process between the electorate and the politicians who would like to lead the nation for the next five years. Therefore the ruling establishment needs to think about the long-term consequences of the elections, and long-term strategies for making them a benchmark for political succession and future political development. The first step should be to consider strengthening the election process by making it more open, fair and competitive; thus making sure that the general population has a stake in the political process in the country and participates more widely in the elections.

The second step is to rebuild trust in the election process among citizens, especially

young people. For nearly two decades the post-Soviet generation has grown up in a political environment where they do not trust in the fairness of the election process, and have become quite skeptical if not cynical. For example, during recent elections to Almaty Maslikhat (City Council) only 28 percent of the citizens came to the ballot. There is an urge to connect with this generation and to convince them that the democratic process and active political participation is the only way to move the young nation forward. This generation needs to be won back, both from various radical groups and ideologies and from political apathy.

The fourth step is to give all parties a chance to participate fairly in the political process, reviving a truly multiparty political environment. The spirit of the multiparty system was lost after previous parliamentary elections, when the Nur Otan practically established a one-party system by controlling all seats in the national parliament. In the end, it is in the interests of the political establishment to deal with differences and to address popular grievances through the democratic electoral process and democratic institutions, and not through confrontations on the streets or barricades.

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# THE DANGER OF ETHNIC NATIONALISM IN KYRGYZSTAN

*Alisher Khamidov and Erica Marat*

*Nationalist feelings have been on the rise in Kyrgyzstan since the ethnic conflict in June 2010. Amid visible and hidden tensions among the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities, the Kyrgyz government has promised to release a special document that would outline a plan on building inter-ethnic peace. This document, scheduled to appear in mid-March, is, however, unlikely to tackle the often hidden ethno-nationalism among ruling political elites. A more complex approach is necessary that would emphasize the importance of citizenship ahead of ethnic identity and openly challenge ethno-nationalist feelings. The country's political leadership must realize that only a civic model of nation-building will allow for a parliamentary system to strengthen in Kyrgyzstan.*

**BACKGROUND:** It feels like déjà-vu all over again. Nearly twenty years ago, when Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991, its citizens faced a nation-building dilemma. Should they build a country in which only the ethnic majority would enjoy preeminence, or should they create a state in which all citizens would have equal rights irrespective of their ethnic belonging? After two decades of wavering between these alternatives, two revolutions and two bloody inter-ethnic conflicts, Kyrgyz citizens are grappling with the same dilemma again. As they vacillate between these two contradictory paths, they risk repeating the mistakes of the past.

In the early 1990s, Kyrgyz citizens lacked a clear understanding of who belonged to their new state. In August 1991, ethnic Kyrgyz barely made up a majority with only 52 percent of the population. Other ethnic groups, including Russians and Uzbeks, demanded more political representation in the government. Eager to quell ethnic tensions, the first president, Askar Akaev, sought to promote a civic-based idea of Kyrgyzstan being a “common home” for all groups. The president also built informal ties with leaders of ethnic minority groups through

the People's Assembly, a quasi-governmental structure. Akayev's liberal policies allowed different groups to establish informal spheres of influence in various economic and civil service sectors.

Having seized power in March 2005, Kyrgyzstan's second president Kurmanbek Bakiyev undid many of Akayev's policies that aimed at fostering harmonious inter-ethnic relations. Under Bakiyev, the role of the People's Assembly declined, and the informal division of economic and social sectors was disrupted. Instead, Bakiyev relied on the security apparatus, led by his brother Janysh, to suppress ethnic minorities. Bakiyev's downfall opened a floodgate of pent-up ethnic tension created by years of biased government policies and ushered in the inter-ethnic clashes of June 2010.

The June events devastated Kyrgyzstan in many ways, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of citizens, the destruction of property, the explosion of ethnic nationalism and the mass emigration of its citizens. But in the eyes of some citizens, both ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, the events clarified the actual state of ethnic majority-minority relations. In keeping with

this view, the June events resolved the perennial identity dilemma because they firmly established the preeminence of the ethnic Kyrgyz in the political and economic spheres. As one Osh resident put it, “the Kyrgyz won, the Uzbeks lost; victors dictate the rules of the game and losers must accept them.” There will be fewer conflicts now that the matter is clarified, some residents say.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Not all citizens, however, accept this view of the post-conflict situation. Some moderates claim that the preeminence of one ethnic group over others will in fact inevitably lead to more confrontations in the future. The moderates’ calls for equal treatment of all citizens, however, are largely overshadowed by the rising influence of nationalists. The nationalists are now seeking to undermine moderates by labeling them as unpatriotic provocateurs.

Among the few politicians with moderate ideas in Kyrgyzstan, President Roza Otunbayeva seems able to separate citizenship from ethnicity. In her speeches following the conflict in Osh, the president tried to highlight the importance of interethnic tolerance and the significance of civic identity. In late 2010, Otunbayeva said that new guidelines for strengthening inter-ethnic peace will be developed in mid-March 2011. As the months passed, however, Otunbayeva and the rest of the political leadership proved reluctant to address the question of ethnicity and citizenship directly.

Instead, during her recent visits to Naryn and Talas, the president allowed herself to be surrounded by ethnic symbols – women dressed in traditional Kyrgyz gowns and artifacts made by local artisans. By surrounding herself with Kyrgyz ethnic symbols but without stressing the importance of equal citizenship, the

president inadvertently indicated her support for the idea that ethnic Kyrgyz are the country’s core group. A more sensitive post-conflict strategy would either distance public officials from ethnocentric symbols or encourage them to pay equal attention to attributes of all ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan.

The Kyrgyz government has been reluctant to address the so-called nationalities question in a more decisive way. As one observer put it, rather than deal with the legacy of the June violence impartially and resolutely, the government’s Soviet-style instinct has been to try and sweep the unpleasant events under the rug and put forward a mantra of “friendship of the peoples”. Troublingly, rather than condemning rising nationalist sentiments in a consistent manner, the majority of Kyrgyz leaders have ostensibly accepted the status-quo which benefits the ethnic majority. This may in part be due to the fear of being toppled by powerful nationalist groups; and in part because some nationalistic figures now control government policy. It may also be that government officials underestimate the importance of resolving the nationalities question. Finally, some state officials seem to be incapable of separating the concept of citizenship from ethnic identity. Some officials privately argue that ethnic Kyrgyz should be treated as the country’s “core” and somewhat privileged group.

Regardless of their motives, the Kyrgyz government’s passive approach to the idea of citizenship is dangerous for a number of reasons. First, it undermines the newly adopted parliamentary system. The new system can potentially encourage the participation of ethnic minorities. However, it could also become a source of tensions should nationalist feelings prevail. In a worst case scenario, the



parliamentary system may fail altogether if ethnic and other social minorities are not politically represented. Excluded from political institutions, citizens representing ethnic minorities risk join banned religious and criminal groups. Ethnic Uzbeks already predominate in Hizb-ut-Tahrir, according to government reports. Second, the rise in nationalism is causing a massive outflow of skilled citizens, thus undermining Kyrgyzstan's ethnic diversity and its ability to develop in a robust manner. Finally, the usurpation of politics by nationalist groups is worsening Kyrgyzstan's relations with regional partners. Already, Russia is livid over an initiative by Kyrgyz nationalists to replace Russian town names with Kyrgyz ones.

If it wants to avoid the pitfalls associated with the current status quo, the Kyrgyz government needs to unequivocally commit itself to the civic model of nation-building. To make this policy genuinely effective, authorities should understand the reasons why the idea of a multi-ethnic state was a failure under the two previous presidents. First, the policy of multi-ethnic harmony remained largely a declarative one, lacking genuine government backing and administrative resources behind it. The main rationale behind the policy was to enlist the

support of ethnic minorities for the presidents during elections and to improve the government's international image. Second, the policy was imposed from above and lacked genuine backing at the level of ordinary residents. Many ethnic Kyrgyz resented the policy because they felt it infringed on their rights as the titular ethnic nationality. A large number of ethnic minority representatives found the policy distasteful because they felt manipulated by the incumbent regimes.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Kyrgyzstan again finds itself at a crossroads. The violent events of 2010 have taken their toll, but they also provide a window of opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the past and settle on a constructive path. If Kyrgyz citizens truly want democratic governance to succeed, they and their leaders must treat ethnic and cultural diversity as a unifying force and not as a political manipulation tool. They should openly challenge nationalist sentiments, emphasize the rights of citizens irrespective of their ethnicity, foster an honest and open debate on the June events, and engage in genuine reconciliation. If Kyrgyz citizens succeed in accomplishing these goals, Kyrgyzstan can become a model for stability and integration of ethnic groups for Central Asia and CIS. If they fail, Kyrgyzstanis will set themselves again on the path to a violent revolution and deadly inter-ethnic conflict.

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## NEW SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FOR CENTRAL ASIA

Sergei Gretskey

*The failure of the CSTO to intervene in Kyrgyzstan last June to stop ethnic violence that followed the ouster of President Bakiyev in April demonstrated the breakdown of the existing regional security institutions in Central Asia. As a result, the overhaul of the regional security system, of which Russia is a linchpin, is likely to become an important issue for discussion between Central Asian states, particularly between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. While it is too early to outline the contours of the new security arrangements, it is clear that Central Asian states will aim at reducing regional security dependence on Russia and favor closer cooperation with the West.*

**BACKGROUND:** Ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan that broke out between local Kyrgyz and Uzbeks last June demonstrated the inadequacy of Central Asia's security arrangements anchored on Russia. The two regional security organizations, the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty (CSTO) Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), of which China is a member, proved unable or unwilling – or both – to intervene in Kyrgyzstan to stabilize its southern region despite the repeated requests of the Kyrgyz interim government. Russia turned down similar requests to intervene on a bilateral basis.

While Russia's reluctance to act unilaterally could be explained by the haunting memories of putting down similar clashes almost twenty years ago to the date, the inaction of the CSTO and SCO was baffling. Both organizations invoked the absence of foreign aggression as justification for the lack of any military and security assistance to Kyrgyzstan. The argument is problematic for at least three reasons. First, the CSTO had no problem intervening in the Tajik civil war of 1992-1997, when, in the absence of foreign aggression, member states (notably Russia) stationed their

troops on the Tajik-Afghan border to prevent the fighters of the United Tajik Opposition from entering their country from Afghanistan. Second, the CSTO and SCO charters list among their goals strengthening regional security and stability through joint activities (Articles 3 and 8 of CSTO's Charter) and joint counteraction against "terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations" (Article 1 of SCO's Charter). The Charters do not reference the conduct of the 'joint activities' or the attainment of the above goals to foreign aggression. The CSTO's inaction was particularly surprising given the existence of its Collective Rapid Reaction Force established in February 2009, which conducted its second exercise two months prior to the Osh events.

Third, the 2010 ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan was fraught with a broader regional conflict: unlike in June 1990, violence in Osh amounted to ethnic cleansing of Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks. Thus, when tens of thousands of Uzbek refugees fled the country and shared their accounts of what happened in Osh, it was the restraint of Uzbekistan, both of its Government and its citizens, that prevented violence in Osh from spiraling into a regional conflict as the CSTO and SCO stood by.



(Photolur)

**IMPLICATIONS:** Understandably, the failure of the two regional organizations, the CSTO in particular, to act in Kyrgyzstan generated frustration and blunt criticism on the part of the interim government of Kyrgyzstan and various political actors. Its most important ramification, however, was the realization by the Central Asian elites that the Russia-centered regional security architecture was no longer working and that they had to take the matter of providing regional security in their own hands.

To that effect, Kazakhstan moved to bring in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), not exactly Moscow's favorite, to help stabilize southern Kyrgyzstan.

Using its position as the 2010 Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Kazakhstan initiated the dispatch of a police force drawn primarily from Western Europe to act as peacekeepers in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Despite its subsequent failure due to the opposition of the Osh regional government, this bold step was important for two reasons. First, the West was invited to participate directly in a regional security operation for the first time. Second, Astana sent a clear signal to Moscow that regardless of the latter's desire to minimize Western presence in the region, Kazakhstan wanted more of it.

For sure, the desire among regional states to reduce security dependence on Russia by

developing close cooperation with the West was evident before the Osh events. It started in 2001 with the active support of the operation “Enduring Freedom” in Afghanistan, above all by allowing the U.S. and NATO military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Since then, Uzbekistan has determinedly pursued, albeit not always successfully, closer security cooperation with the West. Kazakhstan has supported the U.S. war in Iraq by sending a field engineer battalion there. In September 2009, to Moscow’s displeasure, Kazakhstan hosted NATO’s first military exercise in Central Asia.

What makes the situation different now is that Kazakhstan, long considered to be one of Russia’s closest allies, has come to a similar vision of the new regional security architecture – one that would be based on reduced security dependence on Russia and closer security cooperation with the West. Given the importance of security issues for Uzbekistan, this similarity creates an opening for close cooperation between the two regional leaders, which has so far eluded them.

Whether such cooperation develops depends, of course, on the future of the CSTO. Presently, it looks as if the CSTO is turning into an empty shell. Russia, its main donor, has slashed its CSTO budget by a factor of more than 15, from RUB 7.7 billion in 2010 to 0.5 billion in 2011. As for the SCO, it is difficult to imagine that it will pick up where the CSTO left off.

**CONCLUSIONS:** For many Central Asians, the failure of the CSTO and SCO to intervene in Kyrgyzstan to stop ethnic violence signaled the need for an overhaul of the existing regional security architecture. The central idea is to reduce security dependence on Russia and foster closer cooperation with and involvement of the West in regional security institutions. The road to new security arrangements in Central Asia will be long and challenging. Yet, security is a concern for all Central Asian states and they all will benefit from new regional security architecture. Should they succeed in devising it, the door to the long-overdue regional integration may finally be open, which in turn may set the stage for the creation of the Union of the Central Asian States proposed by President Nazarbayev in 2007. For that to happen, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan should work together in designing new regional security institutions. The U.S. and the West should support Central Asians in their quest for new security architecture in the region. Such support will guarantee the independence of Central Asian states and contribute to stability in a volatile region. Both are important for the West, particularly given the uncertainty about the situation in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO troops planned to begin later this year.

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## NAZARBAEV CALLS SNAP APRIL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Robert M. Cutler

*Two months after the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) held its first head-of-state level summit in a decade in Astana, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbaev has used his newly granted powers to set the next presidential election for early April, surprising all potential opposition political formations. In view of his general popularity throughout the country, the only question remaining would appear to be the size of his eventual winning margin. Still, the elections may provide much-needed experience and exposure for a younger generation of Kazakhstani politicians.*

**BACKGROUND:** Nazarbaev, first secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, became president in April 1990 and left his party post in August 1991. His new People's Unity Party won the largest number of seats in the 1994 parliamentary elections. Nazarbaev then tacitly proclaimed war against the Soviet-era inherited state bureaucracy, which was bloated but also represented an opposing power base. After the 1994 elections, lobbies and alliances emerged between parliamentary groupings and the lower and middle ranks in the ministries. After an electoral fraud accusation by one anti-Nazarbaev candidate in a single electoral district, the Constitutional Court ruled the entire parliament illegal and dissolved it. That ruling short-circuited the potential opposition to Nazarbaev nascent from the emerging parliamentary-ministerial alliance. Nazarbaev ruled by decree for over a year. An April 1995 referendum extended his term in office for five years. A new constitution with a "semi-presidential" system on the French and Finnish model was adopted by referendum that autumn. The 1995 constitution reduced the parliament's authority. Its physical removal to Astana further attenuated its influence.

The years 1994-95 marked the end of the post-Soviet intra-elite struggle in Kazakhstan. The

winners cracked down on dissidence and weakened the institutions of the regime. Akezhan Kazhegeldin (prime minister, 1994-1997) was to have run against Nazarbaev as candidate of the Republican People's Party (RPP), created in 1998 as vehicle for that purpose. However, the authorities did not allow his candidacy to be registered. Nazarbaev was overwhelmingly re-elected president in January 1999. In 2001 a new stage arose from the crisis around the creation of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK) grouping, whose principal leaders resigned their ministerial portfolios to join this movement against the political influence of certain branches of Nazarbaev's family. The president's daughter Dariga Nazarbaeva formed the Asar party with a view towards the 2004 parliamentary elections. The Ak Zhol ("Bright Path") Party formed from a split in the DCK movement after two of its leaders were sentenced to prison. In December 2005, Nazarbaev was again overwhelmingly re-elected.

Ak Zhol split in 2006 when four of its leaders broke away to form Naghyz Ak Zhol ("True" Ak Zhol), which renamed itself Azat ("Freedom"). Political conflict is thus mainly played out within the elite, members of which have known each other for years. The political



(AFP)

Otan created the current ruling Nur-Otan Party, which swept every available seat at the 2007 parliamentary elections. In December 2010, Nur-Otan floated the balloon for a referendum allowing Nazarbaev to remain in office until 2020. A petition was reportedly signed by over half all registered voters. However, in January 2011 Nazarbaev vetoed the enabling constitutional amendments, whereupon parliament overrode his veto. Upon Nazarbaev's referral, the Constitutional Council found the amendments unconstitutional. Nazarbaev then submitted draft legislation requesting authority to call a presidential election before the next planned for 2012, which parliament approved. The suddenness leaves all opposition parties unprepared to contest it. In the event, only 14 of the 22 individuals who submitted their candidacy passed the mandatory Kazakh-language test.

**IMPLICATIONS:** There are indications that Nazarbaev would have liked to leave active

class of the country was therefore severely shaken by the 2006 murder of Naghyz Ak Zhol leader Altynbek Sarsenbaev in suspicious circumstances. The 2006 merger of the Civic Party and Dariga Nazarbaeva's Asar with political life five to ten years ago and adopt a more godfatherly role, but circumstances did not permit this. Political conflicts within his family endangering the stability of the government (and which started even in the mid-/late 1990s) together with his seeing one after another member of the political and economic elite pass from government into opposition, complicated the task of executive administration. It is reasonable that he did not feel it possible to leave the office of president, despite the special status attributed to him by amendments the 1995 constitution guaranteeing a unique and guiding role even after leaving office. It would moreover be normal that Nazarbaev, having reached his seventieth year, took stock of the political system he wishes to leave to his country, whether he remains in office or not. The holding of a referendum, which was not necessarily his idea, would have set a bad precedent for the post-Nazarbaev future; calling the snap elections for April gives him political advantage over challengers (which he does not really need) and, in addition, the appearance of half-acquiescence to the petition drive for a referendum, which received wide and undoubtedly genuine popular support.

The state's executive has profound capacity for political initiative, but arbitrary bureaucratic restrictions upon economic activity have led to a situation that critics characterize as "capitalism in one family." Conflicts among various branches of Nazarbaev's family, and also between the family and the technocrats, have consistently weakened formal political institutions. Small counter-elites willing to take political initiatives exist, but they risk being unable to break out of the syndrome of being a "Potemkin opposition" where some of them strike pragmatic alliances with the powers-that-be, leading in the end to their muzzling, while

those not striking such alliances slide down into a spiral of silence. (The fate of the DCK/Ak Zhol movement is indicative in this respect). Thus only three of the 14 candidates approved for the snap presidential elections represent political parties, and none of these is oppositional to Nazarbaev. The main opposition party Azat declared its intention not to run a candidate and, indeed, not to participate in the election process at all.

Political pluralism in Kazakhstan is restricted to a relatively small political and economic elite. Opposition movements within the elite, such as DCK, have sought to liberalize policy for the simple purpose of technocratic and economic rationality. However, there continues to be an absence of socio-economic (i.e. "middle-class") strata interested in and capable of supporting any alternative party. On the broader level of the "political community", some scholars in Kazakhstan have emphasized the aspects of the political culture of historically nomadic Kazakh society that are conducive to broader decision-making participation. There is something to this argument, but there are differences among the three Hordes, and the political culture inherited from the Elder Horde in particular (which remains dominant through informal structures) militates against such democratization. The southern regions of the country are culturally more sympathetic to the charismatic authoritarianism of the country's political leadership. Still more important, although some segments of society understand pluralist-participant democratic norms, nevertheless the country's political life still lacks a genuine public sphere that could serve as a platform for interactive engagement with organized officialdom.

**CONCLUSIONS:** In May 2007 the parliament amended the constitution to allow Nazarbaev to

seek re-election as many times as he might wish (but not his successors, who remain limited to two terms). Nazarbaev's decision to remain indefinitely in the president's seat exacerbated a subterranean power struggle within the ruling clans that was first felt in the late 1990s. Nazarbaev is the only president of a former Soviet republic other than Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov who still leads his country two decades after the USSR's disappearance. New demographic strata need to be brought into Kazakhstan's public life to facilitate the generational succession that must take place in preparation for Nazarbaev's eventual passage from the scene.

The institutions of governance still suffer from a lack of cadre to serve as technocratic managers. Decision-making procedures are not routinized, and rules are not rationalized. The present exercise, or at least the next parliamentary elections in 2012, could provide the opportunity for such new generations to present themselves and gain experience and exposure on the regional and national levels, as the referendum campaign has already done at the local level. The present institutionalization of the present one-party-dominant system may possibly lead to a multiparty system, and then to the alternation of another party in power, as happened for example in Mexico and India in the twentieth century.

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## FIELD REPORTS

### TURKISH BUSINESSES UNDER FIRE IN UZBEKISTAN

*Erkin Akhmadov*

On March 3, 2011, two of Uzbekistan's state-owned TV channels broadcast a special documentary called *Kurnamaklar* (Ungrateful), which uncovered the illegal activities of several Turkish business enterprises operating in Uzbekistan. Local observers note that during the last two years about fifty Turkish enterprises were closed in Uzbekistan and various charges were pressed against their managers. Meanwhile, local media report several reasons for the crackdown against Turkish businesses in the country.

Last year *Demir*, one of the oldest supermarkets of the capital which happens to be Turkish-owned, was closed. On March 2 another major Turkish enterprise, the *Turkuaz* trade center and all its branches in Tashkent, were also closed. Additional Turkish enterprises that have recently been closed include *Orzu-plastic*, *Emirtextile*, *Marmar Group*, *Akeca-textile*, *Oskaynak*, *Kaynak NTA*, among other.

The broadcast program informed that the abovementioned enterprises "abused the favorable investment climate" and friendly relations between the two countries. Thus, the owners and persons affiliated with these businesses were charged with different tax and financial violations. In addition, the program stated that these Turkish businessmen supported the activities of the international religious organization *Nurchular*, which is considered extremist in Uzbekistan, but maintains close ties with the Turkish leadership.

The independent local news source *Harakat* reported that after the closure of the *Turkuaz* trade center, there were massive detentions and interrogations of its staff, consisting of Uzbek and

Turkish citizens. A significant number of controls conducted by the Central Authority on Fighting Contraband under the State Customs Committee, the State Tax Committee, the *Uzstandart* agency, the Antimonopoly Committee, the Assay Office, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, revealed a number of tax violations in the operation of this enterprise. The investigation found that the general director of *Turkuaz*, and the main representative of *Gunes Tekstil* were importing goods and jewelry with forged documents. The documents understated the amount and cost of the goods in order to pay minimum customs duty.

As a result of the alleged criminal activity, the state authorities confiscated valuables constituting worth over 400 million Uzbek Sums (about US\$ 239,000) from the accounts of the Turkish enterprises.

Another hypothesis on the motivation for the massive move against Turkish businesses in Uzbekistan is that such Turkish enterprises as *Gunesh*, *Turkuaz*, *Kaynak*, and the Turkish catering network were involved in distributing literature promoting the activities of the *Nurchular*, *Bozkurt* and *Milli Görus* groups. *Nurchular* is a religious group, consisting of followers of the Turkish Islamic figure *Said Nursi* and of the preacher *Fethullah Gülen*. *Bozkurt* is a nationalistic Turkish youth organization; while *Milli Görus*, also known by the name *Refah*, is a Turkish Islamic movement; the political party *Refah* was outlawed in Turkey in 2001, but its successor, the *Saadet* party, operates to this day. Furthermore, it was stated that the abovementioned enterprises "opened underground venues for conducting religious rites, and underground

shops that provided material support for radical religious activity”.

Some observers think that such charges of involvement with religious activities banned in Uzbekistan is just an excuse for closing numerous Turkish companies in the country, and that the real reasons for doing so are economic ones. Kamron Aliev, an independent political scientist from Tashkent, rejects the idea that the moves against Turkish businesses are related to the worsening of political relations between Uzbekistan and Turkey, which occurred in the late 1990s due to Turkey's support for Muhammad Solih, leader of the Uzbek opposition party Erk. Aliev thinks that there is no hidden political motive behind the actions of the Uzbek authorities, but that they are simply a repartition of property in line with the interests of corrupt local officials.

It should be noted that Komfort-Elit, a large network of furniture stores owned by the Uzbek-Arab joint enterprise Komfort LTD, were recently

closed in Tashkent. It was reported that similarly to the Turkish businesses, the owners of Komfort-Elit made a number of tax violations. Thus, the Uzbek authorities confiscated goods that had no accompanying documents worth over 10 billion Uzbek Sums (US\$ 24 million).

It seems that Turkish businesses, as well as other foreign businesses operating in Uzbekistan, indeed have not followed Uzbekistan's legislation and that their illegal activities were eventually revealed. In the case of Turkish businesses, which have enjoyed quite favorable conditions in Uzbekistan and made large investments into Uzbekistan's economy, their affiliation with certain religious groups provides an additional excuse for their harsh treatment by the Uzbek authorities. However, it is still unclear why the activities of these foreign businessmen were not scrutinized before during their long-term operation in the country and how they managed to import such large quantities of goods while evading local customs.

## AZERBAIJANI POLICE CRACKS DOWN ON PROTESTS

*Mina Muradova*

The Azerbaijani interior forces arrested over 100 anti-governmental protesters during a two-day rally in Baku inspired by the Middle East uprisings. Despite the crackdown, activists believe that it is just a start and that street protests will continue.

A group of youth activists encouraged by the successful overthrow of the authoritarian leaders in Tunisia and Egypt called for peaceful protests via Facebook in “all cities” of oil-rich Azerbaijan on March 11. For this purpose, six activists created the Facebook page “11 March - Great People's Day”, which is supported by over 4,000 users.

“5 persons, 10 persons, 100 persons, 1,000 persons ... It does not matter ... Are you ready to come together to push the dictator regime of Azerbaijan into silence in a civil and sabotage-free way?!” the activists addressed the users. “The nation's power is

a torrent's power. We believe, you also believe. Our Freedom is near!”

At noon on March 11, one month after President Mubarak was ousted after 18 days of protest in Egypt, Azerbaijani youth activists rallied in downtown Baku with the slogans “Be free!”, “Freedom” and “Resign”.

However, the attempt to conduct a rally in the square faced a police crackdown. Security forces, including police and dozens of people in civilian clothing, filled the square in the morning, awaiting the activists' gathering. As soon as they arrived, the police detained them one by one and placed them in patrol cars headed for various police stations.

According to an official statement of the Ministry of Interior, up to 100 people attempted to gather on a

central square in Baku for unauthorized demonstrations. As a result of “preventive measures”, 43 persons were detained. 23 out of these were sent to court, charged with disturbing public order.

Most of the activists are not members of any political party. According to Socialbakers.com, a Facebook traffic-tracking website, Azerbaijan’s number of Facebook users grew by about 5 percent last month reaching 324,880 people, more than three-quarters of whom are between 18 and 34 years old.

On the same day, another attempt to demonstrate was made on Fountain Square of downtown Baku, where protesters demanded the release of their comrades who were detained before the rallies. Before March 11, about 30 youth activists involved in the creation of the Facebook page and distributing leaflets had been arrested.

One of page’s co-organizers, Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, 29, was arrested on March 4 and will be held in pretrial detention for a month for violating an order not to leave the city of Ganja while previous charges of evading military service are investigated.

Hajiyev, alumni of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, managed to send a letter from jail where he said that he was insulted and threatened to be raped by a high-ranking policeman. He has started a “death” hunger strike. “It is better to live one day in dignity than 40 years as a slave” were his last words in his letter from jail.

On March 12, the baton was picked up by youth belonging to the opposition parties People’s Front and Musavat. Protesters arrived at Fountain Square

shouting anti-government slogans such as “Resign”, “Freedom” and “Ilham Aliyev is the biggest corruptionist”. A large number of police officers with truncheons immediately cracked down on the rally that brought together about 200 activists.

“Despite the crackdown, today's demonstration is historic, it marks the start of a democratic movement in Azerbaijan”, Musavat leader Isa Gambar said. “I believe the rally was a success. We will continue to stage protests against the authorities as we want to achieve radical changes in the country”.

Mubariz Qurbanli, a member of the governing New Azerbaijan Party, said the low turnout on Friday proved that the people of Azerbaijan did not support the opposition. According to him, “the Azerbaijani people support the policy of the President and wants stability and welfare, which the current authorities are providing and no foreign scenarios can break the stability in the country”.

Meanwhile, protests continue. On March 14, an area of Baku State University, the biggest in Azerbaijan, was surrounded by police and the road to the university was temporarily blocked by police cars. The APA news agency reported that the police had received information about preparations for a rally among university students, and security forces were sent to suppress the unsanctioned action. Nobody was allowed to gather and nobody was detained.

Youth activists believe that the recent repressions demonstrate that the government is very nervous about the potential of the recent unrest in the Middle East. In addition, the arrests of young activists brought even more international attention to developments in Azerbaijan.

## PROGRESS MADE IN SOCHI MEETING ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH

*Haroutiun Khachatryan*

On March 5, Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents Serzh Sargsyan and Ilham Aliyev held a meeting in Sochi. The Russian President, Dmitri Medvedev acted as a mediator. The meeting was the eighth trilateral one since the presidents met in Russian Meindorf on October 2008, and was initially welcomed by observers as a sign that the negotiation process is still alive. The two presidents signed a statement in Sochi stating that they “emphasized the importance of their regular contacts on issues related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement and agreed to continue these in the same format to complement the work of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group”.

Representatives of the three co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group; Russia, the U.S. and France, were also present in Sochi and held separate meetings with the two presidents. Additional optimism was derived from the fact that, according to the statement, the two presidents agreed “to seek to solve all controversial issues by peaceful means and conduct investigations – with the participation of both sides – into possible incidents along the ceasefire line under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs and with the support of the special representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office”. Both prior to and after the meeting, numerous incidents, including lethal ones, have occurred along the line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian and Azerbaijani troops. Yet, experts express hopes that a new mechanism will be created through which the OSCE will participate in examining the incidents and that this will eventually lead to increased confidence between the parties.

Comments offered by the two parties appeared even more optimistic. First, Novruz Mamedov, the head of the foreign relations department of the Azerbaijani president’s administration, was quoted on March 6 as saying that “A slight positive change

in Yerevan’s position was perceived” at the Sochi meeting. In addition, Sargsyan said on March 12 that “The [recent] meeting in Sochi can be considered a sort of landmark. There is now a clear basis for negotiations and there are agreements for short periods of time”. He also said: “I think the [latest] meeting in Sochi differs from other meetings”. According to Sargsyan, conditions were established during the meeting which may lead to agreements on the basic principles of settlement in the foreseeable future. And if this happens, then real negotiations on the settlement will start.

Hence, the intense preparatory efforts prior to the Sochi meeting in which representatives of Russia, the U.S. (Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg visited the region), and Turkey participated might bring some progress in the efforts to reach a settlement on Nagorno-Karabakh. As an initial step, a mechanism for more intense action of the OSCE structures in the conflict zone should be established. To that end, the OSCE Minsk group co-chairs began a visit to the region on March 15. It is not excluded that the OSCE Minsk group may establish a permanent office in the disputed region. As another positive result of the Sochi meeting, an exchange of POWs may be conducted. A return of the POWs was stipulated by the document signed last October in Astrakhan but has so far not been completed, so the Sochi declaration stipulates that the exchange should be implemented. On March 14, the Armenian Ministry of Defense confirmed its earlier commitment to pass all Azerbaijani POWs to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Another sign of progress is the fact that soon after the Sochi meeting, Azerbaijan called on the Armenian party (it refuses to recognize the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh as a party to the conflict) to withdraw snipers from the contact line. It has repeatedly rejected similar previous calls from

the mediators, saying that the withdrawal of snipers would not help the settlement process. Meanwhile, the authorities of both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have expressed a readiness to follow that call. The removal of snipers was reported to be among the top issues discussed by the co-chairmen with the president of Azerbaijan.

In addition, another meeting of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan may take place in about a

month, according to the reports. Thus, the Sochi meeting has evidently resulted in some reconciliation of the Armenian and Azerbaijani positions, and may pave the way for some progress in the resolution of this conflict, which is over 20 years old. However, the sides still need to display the political will to consolidate the progress made since the previous propaganda clinches are strong on each side and difficult to overcome..

## NAZARBAYEV'S STATEMENTS ANGER KAZAKH MUSLIMS

*Georgiy Voloshin*

On his two-day working trip to the South Kazakhstan region on March 10 and 11, 2011, President Nazarbayev sparked controversy by saying that it was unacceptable for Muslim women in Kazakhstan to wear hijabs and niqabs. Nazarbayev particularly warned against the spread of such practices in public places, such as schools and universities, where younger people are especially prone, according to him, to the "imposed" kinds of religious teaching, not the ones Kazakhstan has always been faithful to. Earlier on that day, Kazakhstan's President visited Turkestan, a city famous for its holy places that are regarded local cultural treasures by Central Asian followers of Islam.

Two dwellers of the remote Ekibastuz city in Northern Kazakhstan reacted to this statement with a promise of a large-scale public campaign against the denigration of Muslims and their traditions by the country's authorities. They believe that the government is trying to strip them of their natural right to worship the religion of their choice, as is stipulated in the constitution. The defenders of hijabs in universities earlier held a meeting with representatives of the Kazakh ministry of education who confirmed that no official ban on Muslim headscarves had ever been enacted or enforced. Nonetheless, a few days later a totally different statement was issued, in which the ministry

announced that "the existence of requirements to the physical appearance of university students does not constitute in itself any discrimination against whatsoever religion; as such requirements are the same for the worshippers of all religions".

The pro-hijab campaigners also promised to start a hunger strike in case their collective voice would not be heard. The prominent human rights defender Vadim Kuramshin, whose preceding experience involved investigations into cases of torture in Kazakhstani prisons, already vowed his support to the promoters of this campaign. At the same time, some female students of the Atyrau University in Western Kazakhstan claimed to once again having been victims of anti-Muslim administrative measures in February 2011, when university authorities warned them against the repeated wearing of headscarves. A similar scandal erupted in November 2010 but was soon downgraded as irrelevant.

Interestingly, the state-owned organization specializing in the restoration of cultural monuments all across the country has recently finalized the renovation of Turkestan's historical, religious and touristic jewel – the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, an unfinished shrine in honor of the 12th century poet and philosopher. In 2000, experts from Turkey had been specifically invited to participate in the restoration of the

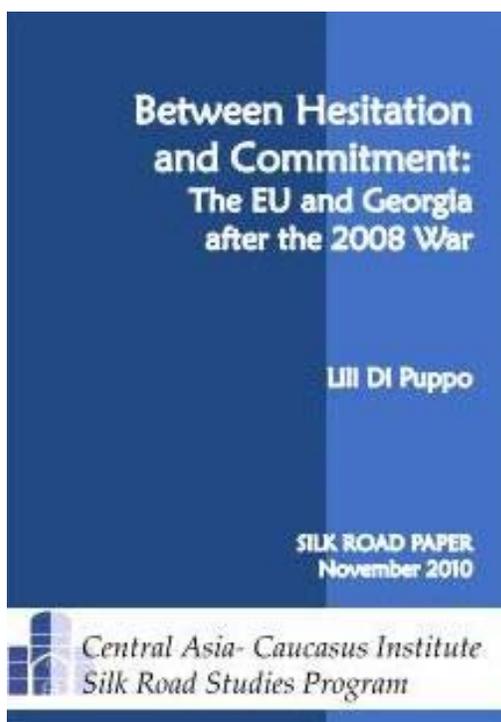
mausoleum's original décor, as it was known at the time of emir Timur (Tamerlan), who in 1389 commissioned a place of reverence for his favorite poet. The 1500th anniversary of Turkestan, celebrated almost eleven years ago, had been overshadowed by significant flaws in the Turkish company's project, thus the Kazakh government has since 2006 been funding a complete rehash of the mausoleum's interior to redress previous deficiencies. Despite this substantial financial support to the Muslim religion, relationships between Kazakh authorities and representatives of Islamic followers in the country have traditionally been difficult.

The Kazakh state not only disfavors the activities of semi-official Muslim organizations teaching the basics of religion in closed-access schools for children and adolescents, but also restricts the scope of initiative of the Muslims' Union of Kazakhstan. The leader of this non-governmental organization, which was officially registered in April 2004, recently proposed his candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections, a move that undoubtedly irritated those in the Akorda. The presidential advisor for political affairs, Ermukhmet Ertysbayev, later said to the press that "the

activities of political organizations based on religious motives are prohibited in Kazakhstan". He also suggested that the leaders of the Muslims' Union of Kazakhstan "think well of their future", implying that their registration may be withdrawn.

Murat Telibekov, the president of the Union which is fully independent of the state-controlled Muslim clergy, announced a series of important reforms on February 14 that he was planning to implement in case of his election to the presidency. He promised, for instance, to opt for the popular election of regional governors against their appointment, currently in force, by the head of state. Telibekov also condemned rampant corruption and the omnipotence of family clans which are blocking necessary reforms and paralyzing further democratization. To all those who feared a radical religious transformation in case of his potential victory, Telibekov reassured the public that he was a supporter of the secular state and did not think fit to change the current form of government.

Although Telibekov's candidacy could not be accepted, he made some think that moderate Muslim forces in Kazakhstan might represent a serious challenge to present-day authorities, fearful of radical Islamism.



New Silk Road Paper:

***Between Hesitation and Commitment: The EU and Georgia after the 2008 War***

**By Lili Di Puppò**

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# NEWS DIGEST

## ELECTION CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF IN KAZAKHSTAN

**3 March**

Campaigning has begun in the former Soviet nation of Kazakhstan for a presidential election that will pit long-serving incumbent Nursultan Nazarbayev against three outsiders. While contestants were officially allowed to begin the campaigning Thursday for the April 3 vote, leading opposition politicians have boycotted an election that they have described as a sham. Nazarbayev's competitors are Gani Kasymov, leader of the Party of Patriots, Communist People's Party chief Zhambyl Akhmetbekov and environmentalist Mels Yeleusizov. Nazarbayev, who has ruled energy-rich Kazakhstan since independence in 1991, is genuinely popular, but critics say he has ruthlessly stifled democracy in this mostly Muslim Central Asian nation. (AP)

## INCIDENT IN SOUTH KYRGYZSTAN TELLS INTERETHNIC TENSION

**3 March**

The incident that took place in south Kyrgyzstan on Tuesday shows there are still bad feelings between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, U.S. expert on Central Asia Bruce Pannier believes. "The whole affair shows there are still bad feelings between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south," Pannier wrote in an e-mail to Trend. A protest action involving about 700 people took place in the Kyrgyz Nookat city on Tuesday. Protesters demanded to make criminally responsible those who ordered the murder of deputy head of the regional tax service Sagynbek Alimbaev. Alimbaev was brutally murdered on Feb. 23. It is assumed that the crime has been ordered by local entrepreneur Adylzhan, a Russian citizen. According to the police of Osh region, he is hiding in the city of Fergana in Uzbekistan. The protesters also set fire to the houses of those accused of involvement in the crime. According to the expert, the incident in Nookat was a bad sign, despite that credit to the authorities, the situation was taken under control

quickly. This is not the first ethnic confrontation in the country, its last major outbreak occurred in June last year, when the confrontations in the south killed more than 400 people. The total destabilization of the situation in the country took place earlier in April, when riots resulted in overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. According to the expert, the demand that the organizer of this murder be brought back from Uzbekistan where he is allegedly hiding cannot be fulfilled, since the Kyrgyz authorities would not dare to enter Uzbekistan to get him. "In addition, there is little chance the Uzbek government would apprehend and extradite him to Kyrgyzstan," Pannier said.

According to the expert, that means there will continue to be Kyrgyz who will be angry because they believe justice has not been served. "Hopefully they will not take out their frustrations on local Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan," the expert said. "Winter is coming to an end and there are people who are predicting that when the temperatures rise so will tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan. So again, what happened in Nookat is a bad sign," Pannier said. (Trend)

## POLICE OFFICER KILLED IN DAGESTAN'S MAKHACHKALA

**4 March**

Deputy head of the Department of the Federal Tax Service for Dagestan Zalkipri Sheikhov was killed in shooting in Mackachkala on Friday morning. As a source in the Interior Ministry of Dagestan told ITAR-TASS, "unidentified people fired on a Nissan Almera car with Sheikhov inside at the corner of Abubakarov and Engels Streets not far from the Spiritual Department of Muslims of Dagestan at about 09.30 Moscow time." An investigation team is working at the site of the incident. (Itar-Tass)

## **AZERBAIJANI, TURKISH THINK TANKS INK MEMORANDUM**

**7 March**

The acting director of the Azerbaijan's Center for Strategic Studies Gulshen Pashayeva and adviser to the Turkish Foreign Minister, director of Center for Strategic Studies Bulent Aras have signed a memorandum here today. The memo envisages organization of joint meetings and researches, cooperation on different fields and other issues. (AzerTAc)

## **UZBEKISTAN JAILS SIX FOR BABY TRAFFICKING**

**7 March**

An Uzbek court has sentenced six people to between seven and 10 years in prison for selling dozens of newborn babies, a pro-government website says. The suspects, who initially included 10 women and two men, were arrested in 2009 on suspicion of organising the sale of a four-month-old baby for \$3,000, gorizont.uz website said. The court hearing "confirmed 70 cases of unlawful child fostering, including four cases in which the babies were taken out of the country," said the website, which is close to the Uzbek law enforcement authorities. The report said that six other defendants received suspended sentences. The group was headed by Ikbarkhon Hamidova, 63, who worked as a lawyer at several maternity hospitals, the report said. (AFP)

## **UZBEK ACTIVIST RETURNS U.S. AWARD TO PROTEST HONORING OF OTUNBAYEVA**

**8 March**

An Uzbek human rights activist says she will return a U.S. State Department award she received in 2009 to protest the award being presented to Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva in Washington, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports.

In an open letter made public on March 7, one day before **Otunbaeva was to be honored**, Mutabar Tajibaeva said the State Department's decision to give the International Women of Courage award to Kyrgyz president "killed my nation's trust in the United States to [maintain] justice and truth." She wrote that Otunbaeva had "let my compatriots in Kyrgyzstan be violently killed...did not do anything to prevent the stealing of humanitarian aid sent to my people, [and] failed to stop the 'ethnic cleansing'...[and] who is unable

to stop persecutions of Uzbeks, which continue even now." More than 400 ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz died in violent ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan's southern regions of Osh and Jalal-Abad in mid-June. Thousands of others were made homeless. Tajibaeva also wrote in her open letter that "to be on one list with Roza Otunbaeva for me would mean a betrayal of my nation, my people. I cannot be on one list with a person whose hands are covered in blood...and therefore I refuse the U.S. State Department's 2009 International Women of Courage award." "I do not have anything against Roza Otunbaeva as a woman; I am against the President of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbaeva, because at the moment when she led [Kyrgyzstan's] interim government, the crime against the Uzbek people was committed," Tajibaeva told RFE/RL on March 8. "She failed to stop it, she did not take any concrete steps [with that aim], and she did not go to the exact places to meet the victims of that crime." The U.S. State Department presents the International Women of Courage award each year to women from different countries on March 8, International Women's Day. It has honored 38 women from 27 countries since the award was instituted in 2007. Otunbaeva, the first female head of state in Central Asia, came to power after the ouster of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010. She is being given the award along with nine other women from such countries as Afghanistan, Cuba, Belarus, and China. The State Department said on its website that Otunbaeva is being given the award for "binding together a historically fractious opposition into a provisional government structure." She oversaw the writing of a new constitution, which was approved in a referendum and shifted power away from the president, and the holding of parliamentary elections. Tajibaeva, 49, spent more than two years in jail in Uzbekistan for her human rights activities. (RFE/RL)

## **KYRGYZ PRESIDENT CALLS FOR US- FUNDED ANTI-TERROR BASE**

**8 March**

The President of Kyrgyzstan has called on the US to fund and support an anti-terrorism centre and improved border police, both to face its domestic threat and prevent terrorists encroaching from neighbouring Tajikistan. Roza Otunbayeva, who was in Washington to receive a "Woman of Courage award" from Hillary Clinton, the US Secretary of State, made her call in a speech at the Carnegie Endowment. "We want to build this

training centre in Batken," she said. US plans to fund the anti-terrorism centre were first announced at the start of last year, but were derailed by the revolution which brought Mrs Otunbayeva to power last April. Under the previous plan, the base cost \$5.5 million (£3.4m), and was to be used to train Kyrgyz security forces in counter-terrorist techniques.

In 1999, the Batken region was the site of Kyrgyzstan's worst terrorist attack, when a detachment of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, crept over the border from a base in Tajikistan, and kidnapped a team of Japanese geologists, and the mayor of Osh, Kyrgyzstan's second city. "I'm very concerned about the Kyrgyz-Tajik border," Mrs Otunbayeva said, explaining that her country has only three border guards per kilometre, compared with seven for Tajikistan, and up to 12 for Uzbekistan. (Daily Telegraph)

## **CIVILIAN DEATHS IN AFGHANISTAN HIT RECORDS HIGH**

**9 March**

The United Nations says the number of civilians killed in the war in Afghanistan jumped to a record high last year.

In an annual report on civilian deaths in the conflict, the UN mission in Afghanistan says more than 2,700 civilians were killed in 2010, a 15 percent rise on the previous year. Insurgents were responsible for 75 percent of those deaths. Sixteen percent were attributed to foreign and government forces, no responsibility could be determined for 9 percent of civilian deaths. Abductions rose 83 percent, and violence continued to spread from the south to the north, east, and west. But the most "alarming" trend, the report said, was that assassinations doubled, with government officials, aid workers and civilians perceived to be supportive of the Afghan government or NATO-led foreign forces being targeted. (RFE/RL)

## **UZBEK PARLIAMENT APPROVES PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSOR RULES**

**9 March**

Uzbekistan has amended its laws to devolve more power to the parliament in a move a rights group said was aimed at securing a smooth power transfer from veteran leader Islam Karimov and placating a critical West. Last November, Karimov, 73, proposed to amend the constitution to allow lawmakers to nominate their own candidate for prime minister and call a vote of no confidence

in the prime minister. The lower house of parliament, which includes no opposition parties, voted Friday to approve the proposed amendments. Few doubt that the loyal upper house will now swiftly rubber-stamp the bill. "This law seeks further democratization of the state, ... a more balanced distribution of prerogatives among the branches of state power," the parliament said in a statement Saturday. Buried among other amendments is a revised Article 96 of the constitution, which now says the head of the upper house would become acting head of state in the event that the president was no longer able to carry out his duties. Previously, the article had been vague about the interim successor in the event that the head of state was unable to fulfill his duties specifically on health grounds. "The changes ... indicate that the authorities might be carrying out the next stage of power transfer to a successor or successors from among the current political elite," Sukhrobjon Ismoilov, head of an Uzbek human rights policy body, Expert Working Group, said by telephone from the capital, Tashkent. In Uzbekistan, the issue of finding a successor is a puzzle for analysts and investors. In 2002, Karimov, who has no sons and has not indicated who could succeed him, held a referendum that extended his five-year term to seven years. In 2007, he won another seven years in an election in which no opposition candidates were allowed to run. The constitution lets a person be elected president for no more than two consecutive seven-year terms. It remains unclear whether Karimov will step down for good in 2014. If he cannot carry out his duties, he now must be replaced by the upper house head — currently Ilgizar Sobirov, a little-known 52-year-old lawyer and former district head of a tiny region. (Reuters)

## **SAAKASHVILI TO VISIT U.S. 'TO SEEK INVESTMENTS'**

**9 March**

President Saakashvili will start visit to the United States on March 10 in an attempt to attract investments, Saakashvili's spokesperson said on March 8. Manana Manjgaladze described the upcoming visit as of "investment and economic" nature during which, she said, Saakashvili would meet with real estate tycoon Donald Trump "to sign a very important contract on investment projects." She said without giving details, that the contract would be "an investment breakthrough" for Georgia "amid difficult economic times."

Saakashvili met with Trump in New York in September, 2010. It was reported at the time that a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Trump Organization, company in charge of Trump's property development, and Silk Road Group, Georgian conglomerate with business interests in transportation, telecommunications, banking and real estate, on development of Trump Tower in Georgia. Saakashvili's spokesperson also said that during the trip, the Georgian President will meet with IMF managing director and will also hold meetings in the U.S. Senate. (Civil Georgia)

### **KAZAKHSTAN & TURKMENISTAN DEAL BLOW TO NABUCCO PIPELINE PROSPECTS** **11 March**

Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have reaffirmed their support for a Russian-backed project to expand natural gas exports out of Central Asia. The news is not a welcome development for those advocating the construction of a new European export route, dubbed Nabucco. According to a statement issued by Kazakhstan's government, Prime Minister Karim Masimov and Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov met in Tehran on March 11 on the sidelines of the Economic Cooperation Organization summit and renewed their commitment to the stalled expansion of the Prikaspiisky pipeline network. "During the meeting much attention was paid to the construction of the Prikaspiisky gas pipeline project. The parties noted that 'everything is on schedule and no problems in the implementation of this project are anticipated,'" the statement said. The pipeline is a joint Gazprom, KazMunaiGaz and Turkmengaz project. According to Gazprom's website, the conduit is designed to carry up to up to 30 billion cubic meters (bcm) of Turkmen gas and 10 bcm of Kazakh gas a year. Construction is due to start later this year. Some experts believe that if the Prikaspiisky expansion proceeds, there might not be sufficient export supplies available to make the planned Nabucco route economically viable. (Eurasianet)

### **TURKMEN PRESIDENT PLANS TO VISIT CHINA** **11 March**

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhhammadov's forthcoming visit to the People's Republic of China "will give more dynamics to the development of mutually beneficial cooperation", the Turkmen government said. It was at Berdimuhhammadov's meeting with the Chinese

ambassador to Turkmenistan U Hunbin, who accomplished his diplomatic mission. Hunbin stressed that "China attaches great significance to the development of multifaceted and promising Turkmen-Chinese cooperation thanks to efforts of the two countries' heads. "Turkmenistan considers China as one of its strategic and reliable partner, with whom it has not only the historical ties of centuries-old friendship dating back to the time of the Great Silk Road but also major joint projects implemented consistently," Berdimuhhammadov said. Commissioning of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline through the territories of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in December 2009 was held up as an example. Hunbin said that he considered it great honour to contribute to and witness the truly historical event: ceremony of commissioning of the Trans-Asia gas pipeline. The interlocutors exchanged views on the possibilities to enhance partnerships in the fuel and energy sector, as well as in petrochemistry and textile industries, transport, communications, construction and other sectors of the economy. The meeting stressed "the vast potential of the Turkmen-Chinese relations effectively realized due to the high level of political confidence between the two countries, similarity of views on key issues of international agenda, as well as regular contacts at the presidential level", the report says. (Trend)

### **TAJIKISTAN SUSPENDS TRAIN ROUTE TO KHUJAND**

**14 March**

Tajikistan's railroad company has suspended trains traveling from the capital, Dushanbe, to the northern city of Khujand, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. Usmon Qalandarov, a deputy head of Tajikistan's railroad company, said today the shutting down of the route is due to a lack of passengers, long delays when the train transits a part of Uzbekistan, and the completion of improvements to a highway to Khujand. He added that in order to be profitable the train needed to carry at least 300 passengers, but it usually had no more than 10. The network -- which was built during the Soviet era -- is problematic for Tajikistan because of its poor relations with Uzbekistan and the difficulty in becoming profitable. Qalandarov said the railroad company proposed the construction of a Dushanbe-Tursunzoda-Khujand rail line which would be 260 kilometers long and almost four times shorter than the present route to Khujand. Another main reason for the small number of passengers on

the Dushanbe-Khujand route is the reconstruction of the mountainous Dushanbe-Khujand highway, built by Chinese engineers, and the construction of a tunnel through the Anzob Gorge by an Iranian company. The major improvements to the highway have led many travelers to go by car instead of train. (RFE/RL)

## **SUICIDE BOMBER STRIKES IN RUSSIA'S DAGESTAN**

**14 March**

A suicide bomber killed one serviceman and wounded four others on Monday in Russia's Dagestan province, where the Kremlin is struggling to contain an Islamist insurgency, Russian news agencies reported. The attacker detonated explosives after approaching a police precinct house in Gubden, a village around 150 km (95 miles) south of the provincial capital Makhachkala, state-run RIA quoted a regional Interior Ministry official as saying. The victims were Interior Ministry troops assigned to guard the police building, the report said. Gubden is known for alleged links to an insurgency aimed at building an Islamic state across Russia's mainly Muslim North Caucasus, which includes Dagestan and several other provinces. Two female suicide bombers from Dagestan struck in Moscow's metro last March, killing 40 people. (Reuters)

## **BAKU CONDEMNED FOR REACTION TO PROTESTS**

**15 March**

Human Rights Watch complained authorities in Azerbaijan had closed-door trials for demonstrators who took part in peaceful protests last week. Opposition protesters swarmed the streets of Baku last week calling on President Ilham Aliyev to resign. The protests were organized by the opposition Musavat movement, which said several of its members were whisked away by police. Party leader Isa Qambar told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's service in Azerbaijan that last week's demonstrations were the most "powerful" in recent years. Police, however, showed "extreme brutality" when confronting demonstrators, he added. Human Rights Watch said at least 30 people were given light prison sentences during closed-door trials last week though more than 100 were rounded up by riot police. Rachel Denber, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said calls for political freedom in Azerbaijan shouldn't land a person in jail. "Azerbaijani authorities should

immediately set free those detained for supporting the protests in Baku," she said in a statement. "Instead of jailing peaceful protesters, the authorities should be investigating police conduct during those rallies." (UPI)

## **OSCE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE VISITS GEORGIA**

**15 March**

OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Ažubalis, arrived in Tbilisi from Baku late on Monday. He said after meeting with the Georgian Foreign Minister, Grigol Vashadze, on March 15 that he was "very much concerned" about military build-up in Georgia's breakaway regions "especially in South Ossetia." "It really worries us. We put this on the table to our European colleagues, to our allies and of course to our Russian partners," Ažubalis said at a joint news conference with his Georgian counterpart. He said that dialogue between Tbilisi and Moscow was "essential." "We are doing our best to find the way how both sides [Russian and Georgia] would keep the constant and open dialogue," Ažubalis said and called on Russia "to strengthen the dialogue and to base this dialogue on a very open and honest way." He welcomed Georgia's non-use of force pledge and added: "We are waiting now from the Russia's side to do the same." The Lithuanian Foreign Minister praised Georgia "for internal democratic reforms" and said the country "is on the right track."

Ažubalis, whose visit is part of his trip to three South Caucasus countries, also plans to meet in Tbilisi with PM Nika Gilauri, as well as with representative of political parties and civil society to discuss Lithuanian OSCE chairmanship's priorities. (Civil Georgia)

## **VASHADZE: LAVROV BROKE WTO TALKS 'TIGHT LIP' DEAL**

**15 March**

Georgia's Foreign Minister, Grigol Vashadze, accused his Russian counterpart of breaching a deal made by Georgian and Russian negotiators not to speak to media about ongoing talks over Russia's WTO bid. "As you know first round of these talks was held [in Bern] on March 10. Two agreements have been reached at that meeting; the first one – to continue talks in April and the second one – the sides should not make comments for the press about the negotiations," Vashadze said while speaking at a joint news conference with visiting OSCE chairman-in-office on March 15. "I want to note

with huge regret, that chief Russian diplomat, Mr. Lavrov, has violated the agreement few days after [the talks], which is traditional for Russian diplomacy. He violated the agreement with one sentence – sent us a threat and put forth preconditions. So judge yourself what a ‘wonderful’ approach the Russian diplomacy has towards achieved agreements,” Vashadze said. Vashadze was referring to Lavrov’s March 13 remarks, when he said, that in case of a failure to agree with Tbilisi, Moscow would seek to become WTO member bypassing Georgia’s consent. Lavrov said that Georgia’s demands to deploy its customs officers at Psou and Roki in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively, as a precondition for endorsing Russia’s WTO bid had nothing to do with WTO-related issues “If our Georgian counterparts persist on such a politicized position, then we will probably have to solve the issue of WTO accession in other way - without their [Georgia’s] consent. There is such a possibility,” Lavrov said in an interview with Moscow-based TV station, Channel 3. (Civil Georgia)

#### **UZBEKISTAN EXPELS HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH’S STAFF**

**15 March**

Human Rights Watch announced on Tuesday that the government of Uzbekistan had decided to expel its employees from the country, a move the group said indicated a “deepening human rights crisis” in the authoritarian former Soviet republic. The Uzbek government gave no reason for the expulsion, though Human Rights Watch said in a statement that the decision had come after years of harassment by officials there. “Well over a dozen human rights and political activists and independent journalists are in prison, torture and ill-treatment in the criminal justice system are systematic, and serious violations go unpunished,” the group said. Human Rights Watch criticized recent moves by the United States and the European Union to improve relations with the Uzbek government and called on them to hold the Central Asian nation accountable for its human rights record. Uzbekistan provides a supply route for equipment going to Afghanistan. (The New York Times)

#### **YEREVAN AGREES TO RETURN TWO AZERBAIJANI SOLDIERS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS**

**15 March**

Armenia is ready to return two Azerbaijani POWs that are at the Armenian side’s disposal without any preconditions through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As reliable sources told Mediamax, the transfer of the POWs to Azerbaijan can take place only if the POWs agree to the transfer. The Armenian Defense Ministry said on March 14 that it is ready to transfer the Azerbaijani POWs in pursuance of agreements reached between the two countries’ presidents on March 5. The conflict between the two South Caucasus countries began in 1988 when Armenia made territorial claims against Azerbaijan. Armenian armed forces have occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan since 1992, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and 7 surrounding districts. Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a ceasefire agreement in 1994. The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group - Russia, France, and the U.S. - are currently holding the peace negotiations. Armenia has not yet implemented the U.N. Security Council’s four resolutions on the liberation of the Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding regions. (Trend)

#### **KAZAKHSTAN DELIVERED 21 KYRGYZ CITIZENS FROM JAPAN**

**15 March**

Aircraft of Kazakhstan’s Emergency Situation Ministry delivered 21 Kyrgyz citizens from Japan’s quake-hit regions, Spokeswoman of the Kyrgyz MFA Lira Sabyrova told 24.kg news agency. She reported that yesterday, March 14, first group of Kyrgyzstanis were delivered from Japan. “They arrived to Almaty in evening. Today they will come to Bishkek along toward afternoon”, she said. Japanese authorities said radiation levels had dropped at the earthquake-damaged Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant Tuesday. There are six reactors at Fukushima Daiichi, located in northeastern Japan about 40 miles (65 kilometers) south of Sendai, one of the areas worst hit by Friday’s earthquake and the resulting tsunami. (Trend)

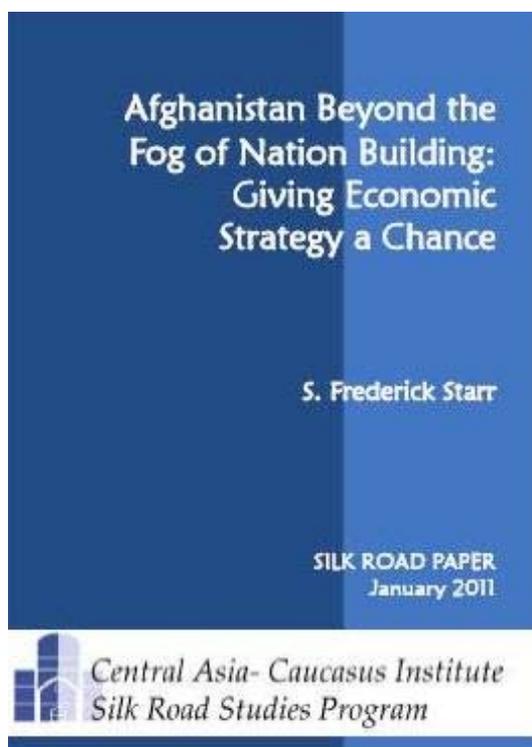
#### **AZERBAIJAN THREATENS TO SHOOT DOWN KARABAKH PLANES**

**16 March**

Azerbaijan has threatened to shoot down civilian planes flying to Nagorno-Karabakh if the sole

civilian airport in the disputed region reopens as planned. The Karabakh Armenian leadership dismissed the threat, saying that the first commercial flights between the territory and Armenia in two decades would start as planned in May. Arif Mammadov, the director of Azerbaijan's Civil Aviation Administration, said the Azerbaijani government warned the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) last October that it did not authorize any flights to Karabakh. "We notified that the airspace over Karabakh is closed," Mammadov said, according to the APA news agency. "The law on aviation envisages the physical destruction of airplanes landing in that territory." Mammadov said Baku sent another letter to the ICAO recently warning that the disputed region's airspace was closed and "at the disposal of Azerbaijan's Air Force." "We asked the ICAO to notify the opposing side in order to prevent negative incidents," he said, adding that the Montreal-based body forwarded that letter to Armenia. Bako Sahakian, the president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic, condemned the threat and warned through a spokesman that any attempt to thwart the planned flights would meet with an "adequate response" from the Karabakh Armenian military. "If Azerbaijan resorts to such actions, it will trigger unpredictable developments," Sahakian's press secretary, Davit Babayan, told RFE/RL's

Armenian Service. "Such threats do not scare us, they only discredit Azerbaijan," Babayan said. "We will go ahead with exploiting our airport as planned." Flights to and from the airport, located 8 kilometers east of Stepanakert, were discontinued in 1991 amid intensifying armed clashes in and around Karabakh that degenerated into a full-scale Armenian-Azerbaijani war. Transport communication between the territory and the outside world has since been carried out by land, via Armenia. The Karabakh government decided in 2009 to reopen the airport, severely damaged during the 1991-94 war. Its \$3 million reconstruction is now nearing completion. A regular flight service between Stepanakert and Yerevan is scheduled to be launched on May 9, a public holiday in Karabakh that will mark the 19th anniversary of a major military victory over Azerbaijan. Dmitry Atbashian, head of the local civil aviation authority, assured journalists earlier this year that flight security "will be ensured 100 percent," despite the airport's proximity to the heavily militarized "line of contact" separating Armenian and Azerbaijani forces. Atbashian also announced that the Stepanakert-Yerevan flights would be carried out by a newly established Karabakh airline, Artsakh Air. He said its fleet of aircraft would consist of three Canadian-made CRJ200 passenger jets. (RFE/RL)



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