

# Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING  
VOL. 16 NO. 04  
19 FEBRUARY 2014

## Contents

### Analytical Articles

**THE SOCHI OLYMPIC GAMES AND THE RISE OF COSSACKS IN THE NORTH  
CAUCASUS** 3

Tomáš Baranec

**MONGOLIA'S FORMER PRESIDENT PLOTS POLITICAL RETURN DESPITE  
CORRUPTION CONVICTION** 7

John C.K.

**PUTIN MAKES THE CIRCASSIAN ISSUE PART OF RUSSIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE  
WEST** 11

Valeriy Dzutsev

**THE TURKIC COUNCIL: WILL THE TURKS FINALLY UNITE?** 15

Alim Bayaliyev

### Field Reports

**KYRGYZSTAN'S PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES 2014 AS YEAR OF STRENGTHENING  
STATEHOOD** 19

Jamil Payaz

**TAJIKISTAN RATIFIES AGREEMENT WITH RUSSIA ON TAJIK LABOR MIGRANTS** 21

Oleg Salimov

**GEORGIA AND RUSSIA PLAN FOR PRESIDENTIAL LEVEL MEETING** 23

Eka Janashia

**KYRGYZSTAN'S NEW UNITED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT** 25

Arslan Sabyrbekov

# THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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

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**Field Reports** focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

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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# THE SOCHI OLYMPIC GAMES AND THE RISE OF COSSACKS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Tomáš Baranec

*On December 5, 2013, Patriarch Kirill publicly supported the plans of Stavropol governor Valery Zerenkov to resettle the Semirechensk Cossacks from Kyrgyzstan to the North Caucasus. This was the most recent in a series of signs showing the steady rise of official support for the Cossacks in the region. Initially this development was frequently attributed to the need for increasing the security of the upcoming Olympic Games in Sochi, highlighted by the recent terrorist attacks in Pyatigorsk and Volgograd. However, the amount of support the Cossacks have started to receive suggests that they may play a much more important role in the Kremlin's strategy.*

**BACKGROUND:** In the 2012, the creation of Cossack militias could be easily attributed to security challenges during the Olympic Games. However, developments in the last two years give reasons to believe that the reappearance of Cossacks in the region is linked more to developments in Makhachkala (Dagestan) than to Sochi and is more than simply a temporary pre-Olympic measure.

Firstly, the amount of projects linked to the Cossacks in the Caucasus exceeded the local needs of pre-Olympic Sochi. In March 2013, following the example of Krasnodar, the Mayor of neighboring Stavropol Krai, Valery Zerenkov, presented a plan to grant legal status to the existing Cossack patrols, infamous for various incidents with Caucasian newcomers. By September 2013, the state funded Cossacks already patrolled half of the Krai. On a federal level, authorities launched a series of projects such as the establishment of new Cossack cadet schools to

supplement the thirty already in existence.

The Kremlin also plans to create four new, solely Cossack brigades within the Russian army, and as the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces Nikolai Makarov stated, some of them could be mounted in observance of tradition. In the context of these calls for resettling Cossack families to the North Caucasus, it appears that the Cossacks are expected to preserve the Slavic presence in the region rather than just prevent Circassian demonstrations in Olympic Sochi.

The Kremlin has in the last two decades adopted a significant number of bills that officially support Cossack movements, with the aim of taming the well organized and often radical Cossacks rather than support their rise. In the early 1990s, the activities of Cossacks ranged from the establishment of "the Union of Cossacks of Russia" to the creation of several illegal militant groups, open demands for the creation of Cossack



republics and revolts in South Russia during the late perestroika period. The apparent recent U-turn in well-established policies toward Cossacks and acceptance of the risks linked to their support can hardly be explained simply by the Sochi Olympic Games.

Taking a closer look at both the scope of Kremlin-backed plans for the development of Cossack activities in South Russia, and the simple fact that the state which has sought to suppress Cossack organizations now supports them implies that the roots of the "Cossack revival" have had little to do with the Olympic Games.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The rise of the Cossacks is better explained by two factors, namely the outflow of the Slavic population from the North Caucasus and their replacement by native Caucasians, and the failure of attempts to apply tools of soft power in Dagestan during Magomedov's presidency.

Stavropol Krai neatly illustrates, on a small scale, the processes that are occurring throughout the whole Northern Caucasus. Stavropol, which has a predominantly Slavic population of 2.8 million, borders Dagestan to the Southeast with a population of similar size, around 2.9 million people of

Caucasian origin. However, while the population of Stavropol Krai increased by 2 percent between 2002 and 2010 (including immigration from Dagestan), Dagestan's population grew by 16 percent in the same period, an issue of serious concern to the Kremlin. As a result, not only traditional Cossack and Slavic areas of Dagestan around Kizlyar have come under the pressure of "Caucasian re-colonization," but lines of compact Dagestani settlements have formed also in some regions of southern Stavropol Krai over the last two decades. The earlier attempts by the Stavropol government to repatriate some Dagestani newcomers back to Dagestan, coupled with the tightening of laws regulating migration to Russia and between its regions, adopted by the Russian Duma in January 2013, clearly demonstrate the Kremlin's concerns over the changing ethnic map of South Russia.

Swift developments have also taken place in Makhachkala, where the short experiment to apply soft power in Dagestan, represented by a policy of open dialogue with non-militant Salafists and the Commission for the Adaption of Former Insurgents, ended after Magomedov's resignation in January 2013. On a regional level, this policy represented an attempt by the Kremlin to address local socio-economic difficulties through the development of local tourist infrastructure. This project, headed by Achmed Bialov (a close associate of Magomedov), seemed to go hand in hand with developments in Makhachkala.

Though possibly steps in the right direction, neither could bring stability to the volatile region without a liberalization of local conditions. Former insurgents did not register with the commission for adaptation as there was no proper legal framework ensuring their safety. Opening a dialogue with the Salafists could not prevent local security forces from kidnapping local – often secular – residents for ransom, thus initiating a circle of blood feud, which significantly swelled the ranks of the insurgents through new recruits. Finally, no improvement of the local socioeconomic situation is foreseeable, since the local population lacks the ability to legally oust the Moscow backed, clan-based, ruling elites that siphon off money from similar state projects.

It seems that the Russian government has realized that none of these policies would be effective without a liberalization of the political situation in the region. Yet the democratization of the region, which would break the symbiotic bond between the Kremlin and local elites, would endanger the federal government's control and is therefore not a valid choice for Putin's administration. This was illustrated through the adoption of indirect elections of Heads of Republics, which was probably specially designed for the North Caucasus.

Putin's administration appears to count on the Chechenization of problematic republics, which may help suppress the symptoms of instability, but ultimately this policy will not address its roots. Therefore, after a

short and unsuccessful flirtation with soft power, the rising anti-Caucasian sentiment in Russian society demands decisive action rather than slow and expansive reform, and the Kremlin is therefore returning to the old policy of crushing any resistance by crude force. Current developments suggest that armed Cossack groups are becoming the newest innovation of this policy.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The Kremlin's flirtation with the Cossacks as a repressive colonizing tool, to tame the turbulent North Caucasus and to delimit the changes to its ethnic map, seems to signal an awareness of its inability to address the roots of regional instability. There are, however, two main reasons to believe that a full adoption of this pseudo-colonization policy risks triggering increased instability. First, the traditional relationship between Cossacks and Mountaineers is characterized by a significant level of mutual distrust, even without state interference. As Cossacks, backed by the Kremlin, become more self-confident, conflicts with locals will become much more frequent, possibly increasing the non-Slavic population's alienation from Moscow even further. Second, a frequently overlooked problem is the independence of the Cossacks themselves. Although the Kremlin's official policy and the traditional worldview of the Cossacks are currently consistent, the Cossacks have not turned into Moscow's servants. They maintain their ability to self-organize and are prepared to openly oppose the government if needed. Such cases have been rare so

far, but the Cossacks present a well organized, dynamic and active force that nobody can guarantee will remain under the full control of the government when unleashed. Therefore, the Kremlin's decision to cut the Gordian knot of instability in the Caucasus through Cossack *shashka* may yet have an unpredictable aftermath.

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# MONGOLIA'S FORMER PRESIDENT PLOTS POLITICAL RETURN DESPITE CORRUPTION CONVICTION

John C.K.

*In 2012, Mongolia's former Prime Minister and President Nambaryn Enkhbayar was convicted of graft, embezzlement, misappropriation of government properties and misuse of his position, and received a seven year prison sentence, with three years commuted. Denouncing the charges, Enkhbayar said that the legal actions were a pretext to stop him running for political office, commenting, "In all countries where the political opponents are removed from contesting elections, the leaders of that country use corruption as an excuse ... This just shows that corruption is a very charged political word to fight against political opponents."*

**BACKGROUND:** Enkhbayar was arrested on April 13, 2012 in a televised raid by dozens of police after investigators from the Independent Authority Against Corruption of Mongolia alleged that he had failed repeatedly to turn up for questioning. Enkhbayar, who served as prime minister and then president until he lost office in a 2009 poll, denied all the charges and called them politically motivated. On 1 August 2013, Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj pardoned Enkhbayar, releasing him from serving the rest of his jail term. Now, following the pardon, Enkhbayar has announced his intention to return to politics.

Corruption charges swirl around the development of the country's mineralogical assets. Unlike most of its post-Soviet neighbors, foreign investors are not seeking hydrocarbons in Mongolia but minerals, including copper, silver, gold and coal. After abandoning Soviet

Communism in 1990, Mongolia's government has sought international investment to develop its mineralogical reserves, given the government's fiscal shortfalls. Mongolia could invite former Soviet allies, its rising eastern Asian neighbor China, or seek Western capitalist investment, but ultimately decided on the last option, with decidedly mixed results.

How to develop these riches to best benefit Mongolian society has been the prime economic political issue for more than a half decade. In 2006 Mongolia's Mineral Law was amended to increase government royalties and licensing fees, reduce tax incentives, set limits on exploration licenses and provide for up to 50 percent government ownership of strategically important resources when jointly funded by the state and private investors.

On August 25, 2009, the Ulsyn Ikh Khural (State Great Hural, or



Parliament) finally repealed the 68 percent windfall profit tax, effective from 1 January 2011, setting the stage for massive foreign investment. Quite aside from energy reserves in the form of coal and minerals such as copper and gold, according to a 2009 U.S. Geological Survey, Mongolia has 31 million tons of rare earth reserves, or 16.77 percent of the world's total, exceeded only by China, currently the world's largest producer of rare earths.

Mongolia's two largest mining sites are the 7.5 billion ton Tavan Tolgoi or "Five Hills" massive coal coke deposit and the US\$ 7 billion Oyu Tolgoi gold and copper mine, the world's largest untapped copper deposit, which is expected to produce 1.2 billion pounds of copper, 3 million ounces of silver and 650,000 ounces of gold annually in its first decade of operation.

Oyu Tolgoi was discovered in 2001 and is now being developed as a joint venture between Turquoise Hill Resources (a majority owned subsidiary of international mining concern Rio Tinto, which bought out the original developer, Canada's Ivanhoe Mines) with 66 percent

ownership and the Mongolian government retaining a mere 34 percent.

The Oyu Tolgoi mining project is the largest financial undertaking in Mongolia's history and is expected upon completion to account for more than 30 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Since Mongolia rejected Soviet Communism, it has been effusively praised in the West for its transition to democracy. However, that transition has not been a smooth one, as rampant corruption and a growing rich-poor divide are causing mounting public frustration, as many Mongolians have yet to see the benefits of economic growth. While democracy and privatization were written into the country's new constitution, the economic collapse after Soviet subsidies ended resulted in widespread poverty and unemployment.

Mongolia is currently one of the world's fastest growing economies, driven by foreign direct investment. It reported a 17 percent growth rate in 2011, and 16.7 percent in the first quarter of 2012.

During a September 2011 Discover Mongolia forum in the capital Ulan Bator, Rio Tinto's country director Cameron McRae essentially threatened those nationalist Mongolian politicians who felt that the current 66/34 percent split on the mine favoring Ivanhoe was inequitable, saying "If even a few voices call for Mongolia's commitments to be broken and agreements to be changed, there is a risk that this will undermine investor



confidences. These few will have to answer to the many Mongolians whose jobs will be on the line, and the local businesses whose prospects will be jeopardized. We are confident that Mongolia will not let this happen; that stability and the rule of law will prevail; that Mongolia's long-awaited economic promise will become a reality."

Disputes over the iniquitous Oyu Tolgoi contract terms continued to fester through 2012 and continued as a political issue in Mongolia, when the government suggested to Turquoise Hill yet again that it was interested in renegotiating the contract terms. In a 22 September Parliamentary session, the Mongolian government determined to seek to increase its share of the Oyu Tolgoi mine but Turquoise Hill again firmly rejected the government's efforts to seek renegotiation of the terms.

The CIA estimates that more than 36 percent of Mongolia's population lives below the poverty line, with an annual per capita income of US\$ 2,900.

Developing the country's mineralogical resources over the last several years acquired distinct political overtones; during the June 2009 parliamentary campaigns, the opposition Ardchilsan Nam, or Democratic Party, promised each Mongolian a 1 million tugrik (US\$ 696) "share of treasure." The successor to the former Communist Party, the ruling Mongol Ardyn Khuv'sgalt Nam, or Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, subsequently topped the DP's largesse, promising that each Mongolian would receive

from the "country's profit" a 1.5 million tugrik (US\$ 1,043) grant.

In the long term the most negative effect of Enkhbayar's pardoning may be to weaken the average Mongolian's respect for the rule of law as being both equitable and just. Enkhbayar's leniency stands in stark contrast to the sentences handed out to six environmentalist nationalists.

On 16 September 2013 the leaders of Mongolia's Gal Undesten ("Fire Nation") environment and human rights coalition organized a mass protest in front of Parliament). The Gal Undesten demonstrators were concerned that MPs were preparing to amend the 2009 "Law to Prohibit Mineral Exploration and Mining Operations at the Headwaters of Rivers, Protected Zones of Water Reservoirs and Forested Areas" in favor of foreign corporate mining interests, with the demonstrators noting that many protected lands had already been mined despite the law, which was intended to preserve the integrity of Mongolia's environment. Six Gal Undesten leaders were arrested at the peaceful demonstration.

On 21 January 2014 the six were sentenced to prison. Five received sentences of 21 years and six months, reduced from 22 years and six months for time served, while one received a two-year sentence for supplying weapons, arrows symbolically fired at the parliament. The discrepancy between Enkhbayar's treatment and the sentences meted out to the Gal Undesten leaders could not be more pronounced.

Finally, Enkhbayar's reemergence complicates Mongolian domestic politics, further muddying the country's political life, and implying that corruption charges can be used for political vendettas, hardly an encouraging development for Mongolia's political life.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Even before his conviction on corruption charges, Enkhbayar in 2012 played the populist card on Oyu Tolgoi, calling for the contract terms to be renegotiated to grant better terms to the government while pressing for the Tavan Tolgoi coal mine, potentially one of the world's biggest coal suppliers, to remain in local hands. Enkhbayar's political reemergence will introduce a further complicating element into future foreign investment in Mongolia. That said, this year the Mongolian economy is projected to grow by 15.3 percent and the International Monetary Fund expects it to be the world's fastest-growing economy over the next decade. Accordingly, Enkhbayar's populism may yet result in the Mongolian people receiving more equitable arrangements for their mineral riches than before. Whether Mongolians will get an increased share of the profits from the country's mineral riches remains to be seen. Enkhbayar's pardoning is no doubt convincing many Mongolians that their government is more concerned with cozy relationships with foreign mining international than public welfare, and the sentences handed out to Gal Undesten leaders underline that relationship.

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# PUTIN MAKES THE CIRCASSIAN ISSUE PART OF RUSSIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE WEST

Valeriy Dzutsev

*As the international community started to pay greater attention to the North Caucasus because of the Sochi Olympics, ethnic minorities' complaints in the region significantly increased. In particular, the Circassians became highly vocal about their grievances. Given the authoritarian and increasingly nationalist regime in the Kremlin, the Russian government perceives the rise of activism among Circassians as a security threat. The Olympics served for Moscow as a certain type of litmus test that pointed to the areas of Russia's vulnerability in the North Caucasus. Now, the aggrieved minorities and the central government appear to be entering a path of confrontation in already volatile region.*

**BACKGROUND:** On February 10, Russia's President Vladimir Putin for the first time publicly mentioned the Circassian issue as related to the Olympics in Sochi. In accordance with the worst traditions of the Soviet regime and the Russian Empire, Putin claimed that there was no Circassian issue as such and that hostile foreign forces were trying to use the locals to harm Russia. Russia's leader blamed the West's Cold War era containment policy against the Soviet Union that was now used against Russian Federation to stall its development. "Regretfully, we see the atavisms of that theory of containment now, as they surface here and there. When Russia demonstrates some positive development, this understandably indicates the appearance of additional strong players, competitors and overall causes [the West] to be concerned about its economy, politics and security. And attempts to contain Russia appear here and there.

Including, of course, unfortunately the Olympics project and as an instrument – using the Circassian factor," Putin said at a meeting with civil organizations of the city of Sochi. The Russian president then went on to reassure his audience that the attempts to undermine Russia's development using the Circassian factor "simply had no prospects" as the Circassians were extremely loyal to Russia.

The authorities in Kabardino-Balkaria that has the largest proportion of Circassians in the North Caucasus apparently did not share Putin's optimism. On February 7, the police cracked down on Circassian activists that protested against the start of the Olympics in Sochi. Dozens of people went out into the streets with the slogan "Sochi is the Land of Genocide!" The security services broke up the protesters' ranks, detaining them along with some bystanders. The majority of the detained people were



released after intensive questioning, but several people remained in custody. The authorities also announced they would deport three Circassian students from Syria who say they did not participate in the protests. Circassian activist Abubekir Murzakan told the news agency Caucasian Knot: "During the questioning they asked us why we are against the Olympiad and the leadership of the country, about our attitude toward the last three governors of Kabardino-Balkaria. Also they asked us about our faith and the Circassian national movement."

A dozen prominent Circassian activists were previously taken into brief police custody in December 2013. After taking them to the capital city of the Krasnodar region, where the Olympics are held, the police questioned them about the whereabouts of an obscure member of the insurgency in the North Caucasus and quickly released them. The harassment of Circassian leaders may have prevented them from staging large protests, but young Circassians, largely unaffiliated with the existing civil organizations, still self-organized via Facebook and delivered their message to the public on February 7.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Many Circassians believe that Russian Empire indulged

in genocidal practices in historical Circassia in the nineteenth century. Circassia of that time extended to Sochi and far beyond. Russian historians and eyewitnesses have documented fairly well that Russia's policy toward the Circassian population around the Black Sea was especially harsh, as Moscow considered this a strategically important region and wanted to replace the local Muslim population with Christian, mainly ethnic Russians. Putin's statement on the absence of grievances among the Circassians is an ominous sign. Given the previous history of the impunity of the Russian security services in the North Caucasus, this means that the Russian government is bound to continue its crackdown on civil organizations and activists. Although the Kremlin does not favor civil organizations in the country in general, ethnically based organizations and expressions of ethnic culture in the North Caucasus are considered especially dangerous. Moscow's attitude was demonstrated in the government's promises to feature an element of Circassian culture as an indigenous people of Sochi in the opening ceremony. However, at the opening of the Olympics, the Circassians discovered to their dismay that they did not occupy even the slightest portion in the presentation of Sochi to the world. This came as a shock to many Circassians, including among individuals that are entirely loyal to Moscow and supported the Olympic Games in Sochi from the very beginning. One such Circassian leader,

Asker Sokht, said that “The organizers of the Olympic Games clearly demonstrated that contemporary Russia is wary of its multiethnic, multi religious character,” while “playing along with the xenophobic attitudes of a marginal part of Russian society is becoming the state policy.” Within days after this statement, on February 14, the police arrested Asker Sokht and he was promptly sentenced to 8 days in prison for “resisting the police.”

Despite the fact that the Olympics will soon be over, the profound effect it had on the Circassians is unlikely to dissipate any time soon. This result is due not only to the grievances currently harbored by Circassians, but also to the rising Russian nationalism that prevents Moscow from pursuing accommodating policies toward ethnic minorities, especially those located in the North Caucasus. Circassian activism will inevitably be seen by Moscow as “treachery” and a security threat to Russia, so more government pressure against locals is likely to ensue.

Putin’s statement practically rendered the Circassian issue as part of Russia’s traditional struggle against Western imperialism that is depicted as both extremely dangerous as well as decadent. The statement was most likely addressed to both the domestic audience and the West. For the domestic listeners, Putin’s words imply that the Russian government plans to eliminate the handful of Circassian activists that are unhappy with Moscow’s policies in the region. The message to the West is that if they provide support to the Circassians,

they will confirm Putin’s assertion that Circassians are being used “to contain Russia.” Absent such support, Moscow will feel more comfortable to proceed with its plans to crack down on Circassian activists after the Olympics. Hence, Putin’s warning is essentially a rhetorical tool to place the West in an inconvenient zugzwang position that should prevent greater Western engagement with the North Caucasus, in particular with regard to the Circassian issue.

**CONCLUSIONS:** As the Olympics put the spotlight on the Circassians in the North Caucasus, Russia has become especially concerned about foreign involvement in the region. The pretense invoked by President Putin and more generally by the Russian government, dates back at least to the 19th century and includes denial of internal problems, claiming foreign meddling in Russia’s affairs, and a low profile campaign of violence against the leaders of the opposition movement. Despite all the trump cards Moscow has in its hands, Circassian activism is unlikely to subside soon, because apart from widely shared grievances, the Circassians along with other North Caucasians, contemplate the rise of ethnic Russian nationalism. Having the benefit of extensive ties abroad among the Circassian Diaspora and some freedom of movement, the North Caucasian Circassians appear to face a long campaign to win concessions from Moscow.

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# THE TURKIC COUNCIL: WILL THE TURKS FINALLY UNITE?

Alim Bayaliyev

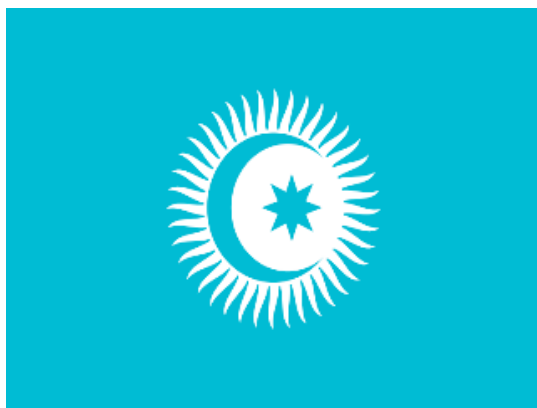
*In early June this year, Turkey will host the fourth Summit of the Turkic Council, an intergovernmental organization that brings together Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey. Presidents Ilham Aliyev, Nursultan Nazarbayev, Almazbek Atambayev, and Abdullah Gül will discuss a wide range of issues related to multilateral cooperation among their countries as well as other matters pertaining to the broader regional context. While the Council has since its establishment in 2009 made meaningful progress on institutionalizing the interaction among the engaged Turkic states, it will take more time and a concerted effort to build a strong, vibrant, and sustainable political alliance.*

**BACKGROUND:** The modern Turkic nations trace their origins back to historical Turkic peoples, states, and empires, which dominated the Central Eurasian landmass during the Middle Ages and early modern times. The apex of the Turkic dominance in Eurasia and Northern Africa was presumably the 16th century when the Ottoman, Safavid, Baburid, and Mamluk Empires, all led by Turkic dynasties, exerted power over various parts of the Old World. The Turkic peoples and states, however, were rarely united and continuously clashed with each other, in their Central Asian homeland and beyond. Ultimately, the Turks were subdued, their territories partitioned and incorporated into peripheral empires.

In 1991, five independent Turkic republics emerged in the heart of Eurasia after the downfall of the Soviet Union. Together with the already existing Republic of Turkey, there were now six sovereign states that were Turkic in nature.

Believing history had offered it a unique chance to assert itself in the region, Turkey under late President Turgut Özal moved swiftly to strengthen its ties with the new republics, primarily through investment and education initiatives. However, not only did the frequently repeated slogans of the time promoting “the Turkic world from the Adriatic to the Great Wall of China” or claiming that “the 21st century will be the century of Turks” annoy other international actors in the region, as one would expect, but they were also met with caution in the newly independent states.

In 1992, these leaders joined President Özal in Ankara for the First Summit of the Presidents of the Turkic Speaking States as early as 1992. This first summit was followed by nine more, but the only multilateral outcome of these meetings was summit declarations that consisted of mostly non-binding provisions. The newly emergent Turkic republics spent the first two decades of independence



consolidating their sovereignty, showing little interest in committing themselves to any sort of multilateral cooperation or regional integration.

Yet in 2009, at the Ninth Summit of the Presidents of the Turkic Speaking States, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey signed the Nakhchivan Agreement on the establishment of the Cooperation Council of the Turkic Speaking States, a permanent structure for Turkic collaboration. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the two remaining Turkic states, dropped out of the integration process along the way and chose not to join the Nakhchivan Agreement.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The overarching goal of the Turkic Council is to promote comprehensive cooperation among the member states, in the political, economic, and cultural spheres. To this end, the international organization also functions as an umbrella body for all other autonomous collaboration mechanisms like the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA), International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), and Turkic Academy.

Apart from honoring the common historical, linguistic and cultural

heritage, each of the Turkic Council member states joined the alliance for hard-headed reasons. Most importantly, the underlying aim is to sustain and promote the members' position as subjects rather than objects of the geopolitical relations in Eurasia in a unified effort.

Although the primary focus of the Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party government has been to (re)build ties with the immediate neighborhood, including the Middle East, Balkans, and Caucasus, strengthening relations with Turkic republics maintains a special importance on the list of priorities. The mood has changed from the 1990s as a more pragmatic and realistic *modus operandi* has supplanted romantic and excessively enthusiastic expectations of the first decade. Turkic republics and more generally Central Eurasia will always be one of the key directions of Turkish foreign policy as the country is keen to capitalize on the advantages of its geostrategic location, historical experiences, and cultural affinity with all relevant regions to the greatest extent possible.

The idea of establishing the Turkic Council is unanimously ascribed to Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Nazarbayev is also the only Head of State who has participated in all Turkic summits since 1992. This should come as no surprise since Kazakhstan, once the most Russified of the non-Slavic Soviet republics, has strived to strike a balance between different powers and geopolitical interests. Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy has been



instrumental in serving the nation's economic interests as well as avoiding significant tension with any country. The Turkic vector and particularly multilateral cooperation within the framework of the Turkic Council is, therefore, viewed as an important dimension diversifying Kazakhstan's foreign policy "basket" and opening up additional room for maneuver.

President Nazarbayev's talk on Turkic unity in the context of the Russia-led Eurasian project is a clear illustration of multi-vector diplomacy in action. One particular example of these "Turkic orations" that stirred up debate was Nazarbayev's speech during his official visit to Turkey in October 2012 in which he maintained that "Kazakhs live in the motherland of all Turkic peoples" and that "after the regicide of the last Kazakh khan, Kazakhstan became a colony of the Russian Empire and subsequently the Soviet Union". Another example was Nazarbayev's proposal at the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in October 2013 to admit Turkey to the Customs Union in order "to cease speculations over Russia's plans to rebuild the Soviet Union".

The diversification incentive is also true for Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. Turkey has become Azerbaijan's major strategic partner, and strengthened ties with other Turkic republics are considered beneficial considering the country's uneasy environment and its predicament over Nagorno-Karabakh. Cooperation in developing transport corridors and energy pipelines is another motive for Azerbaijan to develop relations across the Caspian

Sea. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, has become a major strategic partner of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have hitherto abstained from joining the Turkic Council but it is clear that, in the final analysis, the jigsaw puzzle of Turkic integration will not be complete without them.

During the past decade, the young Turkic republics have solidified their independence and are now skilled, albeit to varying degrees, at the game of multi-vectoring. Thus the Turkic geography is different from what it was two decades ago with a multipolar configuration now in place, featuring relatively affluent Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. This provides a better and more stable ground for coalescing. Challenges also exist since the countries stretch across three crucial and unstable or potentially volatile regions: the Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. They also rely on different security alliances: NATO in Turkey's case and the CSTO and SCO for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Complicating matters even more is the fact that Kazakhstan is a member of the Customs Union with Russia and Belarus while Turkey still aspires to becoming part of the EU.

**CONCLUSIONS:** In 1991, the vast swath of Central Eurasia was drastically reshaped by the reemergence of Turkic states. The establishment of the Turkic Council as a permanent broad-gauge cooperation mechanism among these states is, no doubt, the most important milestone of Turkic integration. Differing from the emotional sloganeering of pan-

Turkists, this integration is being carried out in a coolheaded, pragmatic, and businesslike manner. Its architects have been at pains to persuade external powers the Council was not conceived as an alliance against third parties, but that countries which share so much in common should naturally desire to form a union of some sort and promote collective identity. This tendency constitutes the *raison d'être* of the Turkic Council, which, in the words of Halil Akinci, the founding Secretary-General of the organization, has become the first voluntary alliance of Turkic states in history.

Whether this alliance will evolve into a comprehensive union possessing significant geopolitical clout depends on a number of factors, most importantly on the strategic vision and political will of the national elites. The fact that the geostrategic context of Eurasia as well as the global tectonic shifts, including the rise of regionalization, call for strengthened bonds, cooperation, and coordination does not ensure that the right strategy and policies will be implemented. Turkic integration will have to be buttressed by sound intellectual groundwork, effective structures, and appropriately educated and motivated domestic and international bureaucracies.

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## KYRGYZSTAN'S PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES 2014 AS YEAR OF STRENGTHENING STATEHOOD

Jamil Payaz

On January 30, President Almazbek Atambayev signed a decree announcing 2014 as the year of strengthening statehood. He stated that the main threats to Kyrgyzstan's statehood emanate from tensions within the political elite and irresponsible activities of some politicians that jeopardize national security and people's unity. The decree comes at a time when the opposition has grown increasingly weak after a number of corruption cases have been launched against its leaders. Critics say the government's campaign for enforcing the rule of law and against corruption are applied selectively.

In his decree, President Atambayev identified the state of the political elite as the main problem and a source of major challenges to the state. He faulted some members of the elite for lacking a statesmanlike approach and using populist rhetoric in order to gain access to state resources or avoid justice for abuse of power committed as former officials. He stressed that a special category of politicians has emerged who possess the manpower and control of media outlets to destabilize some regions by fuelling interregional, tribal, and interethnic issues. The decree recommends that the parliament and the government streamline the legislation and take measures aimed at ensuring the rule of law and effective state management

through balancing the central and local governments' powers; and at preventing political extremism, regionalism, and nationalism.

In fact, the prospect of arrests for organizing protests advocating nationalization of the Kumtor gold mine, which resulted in a hostage taking and violent clashes with the police last year, effectively muted many opposition leaders. This is especially true for the Ata Jurt faction in the parliament, which enjoys major support in the country's south. Former Ata Jurt MP Sadyr Japarov, who spent over a year in prison and was stripped of his MP mandate, left for Minsk, Belarus, in October following an anti-Centerra protest in Karakol, Yssyk-Kul, apparently mobilized by him and his relatives. There the protesters, some on horseback, kept the governor of the province, Emil Kaptagayev, as a hostage in a gasoline-soaked car, which, local authorities stressed, belonged to Japarov's sister. Shortly after this incident, another vociferous opponent of the government who has likewise lost his MP mandate, Kamchybek Tashiev, was cowed into silence after his teenage son was caught with a petty crime.

Practically, the absence of these ardent critics of Atambayev in the parliament helped the government to pass controversial deals through the legislature, including the sale of

Kyrgyzgas to Russia's Gazprom and the new arrangement with Canada's Centerra over the Kumtor gold mine.

It is clear that the opposition Ata Jurt party, which harbors many former officials once close to the former president's regime, asymmetrically suffered from the anti-corruption campaign, as some key members of the current cabinet are believed to have committed equally grave crimes. Ata Jurt's two MPs, Nurlan Sulaimanov and Kurmanbek Osmonov, left Kyrgyzstan following news of their possible arrests on embezzlement and corruption charges. The election authority has recently stripped Sulaimanov of his mandate for failing over 30 times to take part in parliamentary sessions. Yet, the most publicized case of all is the arrest of another Ata Jurt MP, Akmatbek Keldibekov, who is accused of corruption, abuse of power, and fraud while he headed the Social Fund in 2005 and the State Tax Service in 2008, and was the Speaker of the parliament in 2010. Few doubt his guilt, but his wealth and a network of supporters in the south might pose real challenges to the government in the event of his conviction.

The decree also comes two weeks after the mayoral elections in Osh, which resulted in the victory of a pro-Atambayev candidate, Aitmamat Kadyrbaev, over the controversial mayor Melis Myrsakmatov. Myrsakmatov gained popularity in Osh, particularly among ethnic Kyrgyz, following the June 2010 interethnic clashes by using nationalist rhetoric

and embarking on reconstructing the city's infrastructure, as well as erecting monuments of Kyrgyz heroes in the city. As the only high-ranking official who remained in his position after the ousting of the Bakiyev regime in April 2010, Myrzakmatov was viewed as unbridled by Bishkek as he single-handedly ran the country's second-largest city, criticized the central government, and buttressed Keldibekov's supporters in the south.

It is not clear what awaits Myrzakmatov, but he will likely lose control of the OshTV channel. The decree coincides with a criminal case launched against the channel for allegedly inciting interregional hatred while covering the January 15 mayoral elections. Representatives of law enforcement agencies have already said that the channel's ownership documents, controversially signed in 2010, are under review and that its antennas will be dismantled. In the wake of the June events, Myrzakmatov reportedly took over the channel from an ethnic Uzbek owner. Up until the elections, the channel was used to feed his popularity and counterbalance his coverage in the state channels. In spring, when Myrzakmatov has promised to resume his political activity, he might have no means to wage his media campaign.

On February 12, the fragmented opposition groups joined a United Opposition Movement, to oppose what they called a revival of authoritarianism, one-man rule, and economic crisis. A pro-U.S. MP, Ravshan Jeenbekov, was elected leader of what looks like a discordant

movement, harboring conflicting views on major issues including the Customs Union, foreign investment, and minority issues. However, Atambayev's failure to show impartiality in enforcing laws and fighting corruption might easily generate a wide support for this group.

## **TAJIKISTAN RATIFIES AGREEMENT WITH RUSSIA ON TAJIK LABOR MIGRANTS**

Oleg Salimov

As reported by an official press release on February 12, 2014, Tajikistan's parliament ratified the recently signed "Protocol of amendments to the Tajikistan-Russia governmental agreement on labor activities of their citizens in the host countries." This protocol came in addition to an earlier agreement signed on October 16, 2004. The ratified amendments extend the validity of work permits issued by Russia to Tajik labor migrants from one to three years. Tajik labor migrants can now stay in Russia longer, without needing to leave and reenter the country every year as was provisioned by the initial agreement. The protocol of amendments is part of a larger set of memorandums signed by Presidents Vladimir Putin and Emomali Rakhmon in October of 2012. The most critical part of these memorandums was the extended terms for the Russian military base in

Tajikistan, which can now remain until 2042 free of charge. In exchange, among other conditions, the Russian side promised to revise the conditions for tariffs-free export of fuel to Tajikistan and introducing migratory preferences for Tajik labor migrants.

Besides the extended work permits, an extension of unregistered stay in Russia for Tajik citizens up to 15 days was introduced, an 8 day increase from the standard 7 days for other foreigners. Also proposed for amendments were the provision of Russian assistance for Tajik migratory centers preparing migrants for labor activity in Russia, exchange of information on labor market demands, and the creation in Tajikistan of a specialized Russian-funded educational institution to prepare professionals for Russia's needs.

When lobbying the ratification of the amendments in Parliament, the Tajik

Minister of Labor, Migration, and Employment Sumangul Tagoeva emphasized that the amendments would bring relief for Tajik labor migrants who could continuously stay in Russia for up to three years. The interest in allowing Tajiks to stay longer in Russia, expressed by the Minister of Labor, can be considered as out of the ordinary unless the Minister's priorities have shifted from creating jobs and controlling migration to outsourcing Tajikistan's workforce to Russia. A possible explanation for this official position can be found in at least two benefits that the Tajik government envisions from the extended employment of Tajiks in Russia.

First, the remittances sent by labor migrants to Tajikistan comprise a significant part of Tajikistan's economy and the country's income. According to World Bank, the total amount of annual remittances to Tajikistan in 2012 exceeded US\$ 3.3 billion. Tajikistan's GDP in 2012 was US\$ 6.9 billion, meaning that labor migrants sent home an amount corresponding to nearly half the country's GDP. Although it can be assumed that not all remittances were sent from Russia, Tajikistan's government cannot afford losing this source of money influx to the country. Second, keeping large masses of adult men, who constitute the major share of the labor migration, outside of Tajikistan alleviates the internal social pressures created by unemployment and a crumbling economy. According to Russian Immigration Services, men and women age 18 to 29 make up the

largest groups of Tajik migrants, respectively amounting to 418,000 and 65,000. Altogether, Russia hosts almost 1 million Tajik migrants. By encouraging its able-bodied population to stay out of Tajikistan, the government can disable and control the protest movement in the country. At the same time, for Tajik labor migrants, the extended stay abroad can result in a detachment from realities back home, which serves a similar purpose. Therefore, labor migration is partly a way for Tajikistan's government to soften demands to implement economic and democratic reforms.

While Tajik labor migration provides relief for migrants' families in the short run, it also accelerates Tajikistan's deprivation in the long run. First, Tajik labor migration contributes to consolidating an economy dependent on remittances, preventing the country from developing a production sector and adequately engaging in international trade. It also makes Tajikistan an easy target for Russian manipulation as the last agreement on the military base has shown. Second, as a developing country, Tajikistan should retain its workforce and develop human capital rather than export its human assets.

Finally, with a large portion of its workforce dislocated, Tajikistan's government can afford to concern itself less with problems pertaining to the stalled economy or the political system - a recipe for an increasingly stagnant, unproductive, and increasingly authoritarian government. Overall, the increased

incentives for mass labor migration that are created under the recently ratified agreements risks becoming a complex problem covering multiple sides of life. Besides the economic and political consequences for Tajikistan,

the presence of labor migrants in Russia generates social tension in the host country, which is reflected in the rapid rise of xenophobic sentiments in Russia.

## **GEORGIA AND RUSSIA PLAN FOR PRESIDENTIAL LEVEL MEETING**

Eka Janashia

Georgian authorities have expressed their readiness to prepare for a top-level meeting between Georgia's and Russia's presidents. The last time the two countries' presidents met was in July 2008, prior to the August war between Russian and Georgia.

On February 6, the Russian president's spokesperson Dmitri Peskov did not "rule out" the possibility of a meeting between the presidents during the Olympic Games in Sochi. Peskov refused to elaborate on the issue, noting that Russia's president Vladimir Putin would welcome anyone "who comes as a guest" to the event. Georgia's presidential administration was quick to decline a meeting in Sochi as the Georgian official delegation did not plan to attend the Winter Olympic Games.

The topic gained new momentum while Putin said during the event that the Olympic Games contributed to rapprochement between Russia and Georgia and wished success to Georgian athletes participating in it.

Responding to a question from Georgian journalists whether he would meet the Georgian president Giorgi Margvelashvili, Putin said "Yes, if he wants; why not." Putin's statement was followed by one from Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Gregory Karasin, indicating that he would discuss the details of a possible high-level meeting in the format of a bilateral dialogue, scheduled for March, with Zurab Abashidze, the Georgian Prime Minister's Representative for Russian Relations.

After that statement, Georgian authorities confirmed that they were ready to have a direct dialogue with Kremlin. "Such a meeting – on such a level and after such a long pause – requires very serious preparation and planning," Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili said when commenting on Putin's remarks. He also noted that Western partners expect Georgia to take positive steps towards Russia and intensify its constructive dialogue with Moscow.

Likewise, President Margvelashvili said that issue should be analyzed cautiously. In the Rustavi 2 TV talk show Position on 14 February, Margvelashvili said that he does not expect the Kremlin to mount pressure on Georgia to refrain from signing an Association Agreement with the EU. Margvelashvili stressed that since there is no military solution to restore Georgia's territorial integrity, the Georgian government might show Moscow that it is ready to discuss "in a rational context what might be Russia's interest."

In January, apparently under instructions from the Kremlin, Abkhazia's *de facto* government redrew its so-called "border zone" with Russia almost by 11 kilometers deeper into region to enlarge the security area around Sochi and to reinforce safety measures ahead of the Olympic Games. It is not clear whether the "border zone" will be reverted to its initial boundaries after the event.

Despite this move, Gharibashvili confirmed Georgia's willingness to cooperate with Moscow on security matters ahead of the Sochi Olympics at the Munich Security Conference on February 1. According to Ekho Kavkaza, prior to the opening of the Olympics, Georgian border guards restricted entry for some North Caucasus residents via the Upper Larsi checkpoint located at the state border between Georgia and Russia. At the Munich conference, Gharibashvili also declared that Georgia has an unresolved conflict with its brothers, Abkhazians and South Ossetians, which was interpreted by the political

opposition and some analysts as an attempt by the PM to downplay Moscow's role as a conflict instigator.

Another important step is the agreement in January by Georgian authorities to extradite the North Caucasian Mikhail Kadiev to Moscow. Kadiev is wanted in Russia and was arrested for illegal acquisition and possession of weapons and explosive substances by Georgian law enforcement in July 2013. Georgia's Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation did not grant him political asylum. Kadiev's lawyer, Gela Nikolaishvili, insists that Georgian authorities plan to deport other North Caucasian suspects of extremism to Russia in order to please Moscow.

Another development that Moscow might have appreciated is the appointment of UK citizen Ryan Grist as the deputy Head of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM). Grist publicly blamed the Georgian government for launching military actions in August 2008, while he held the post of Deputy Head of the OSCE mission in Georgia. He assessed the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali as "completely indiscriminate and disproportionate." Terhi Hakala, then Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, dismissed his comments. The Georgian government has not expressed concerns regarding Grist's appointment.

Instead, Tbilisi insists that its steps and rhetoric correspond with its declared policy to normalize relations with Russia. However, sometimes the initially stated "normalization" looks more like an "appeasement" policy



reflected in the lack of a clearly defined agenda stating what objectives should be reached and what concessions can be tolerated. Thus, in order to work toward the goal of normalization, Georgia needs to develop a more coherent approach based on clearly defined national interests, especially ahead of a

possible high-level meeting between Georgian and Russian counterparts. In addition, Tbilisi should ensure that direct dialogue will not undermine the multilateral format of the Geneva Talks, in which Georgia-Russia negotiations are conducted in the presence of partner countries.

## KYRGYZSTAN'S NEW UNITED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT

Arslan Sabyrbekov

At a meeting on February 12, the leaders of several political parties in Kyrgyzstan established a United Opposition Movement and elected an opposition member of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Ravshan Jeenbekov, as its leader.

The newly created opposition movement is highly representative in its membership. It includes the recently defeated ex-mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov and his Uluttar Birimdigi party, General Omurbek Suvanaliev, former Kyrgyz MP Kamchybek Tashiev, former Prosecutor General Azimbek Beknazarov, and the leader of Kyrgyzstan's Peoples' Democratic Party Artur Medetbekov. Reportedly, several other acting members of the Parliament have also expressed their willingness to join the movement, but

their names are not yet known to the wider public.

In the words of the movement's leader Jeenbekov, the newly united opposition movement pursues three fundamental goals. "The first and far most important objective is to reinstate the current Constitution. It is in fact not bad but the Kyrgyz president has completely violated it with an objective of consolidating his power," Jeenbekov stated.

The movement's second objective is the establishment of a purely parliamentary form of government which, in the words of the movement's members, "proved itself to be an efficient and more democratic way of organizing and running the state." Jeenbekov defined the movement's third objective as a continuous struggle against the authoritarianism of the state power. He stated that "the

President has done nothing over the past two and a half years, his promises and our hopes are melting like the spring snow and his power is merging with crime. Having created the new movement, we will fight against the ruling regime and constructively suggest our vision for the country's future development, before it becomes too late."

According to local political analysts, the movement can indeed turn into a real force against the current ruling regime, which has lately sustained heavy criticism for its alleged failure to reach an agreement that safeguards Kyrgyzstan's national interests with Canada's Centerra Gold over the ownership of the Kumtor mine, its selective and politically motivated arrests of politicians on corruption charges, the release of criminal boss Aziz Batukaev from prison and a number of other developments raising concerns among the Kyrgyz public. Some do not exclude the possibility that the movement can in the near future turn into a single political party, ready to compete in the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for next year.

As for the newly elected leader of the United Opposition Movement, public opinion displays divisions as well. For some, Jeenbekov is a young, reform minded politician, an independent MP who has left his fraction due to strong ideological differences. He is a graduate from the MIT Sloan School of Management and an active user of social media, who personally responds to all the comments posed by his more

than 4,500 followers. His supporters consider him to be a truly spirited liberal democrat, constantly calling for progressive reforms. He also recently attended and spoke at the Euromaidan in Kiev, supporting the country's commitment to democracy and its integration with the EU. Local media was quick to judge Jeenbekov's decision to attend a rally in support for another country's opposition and has made allegations that he possibly met with U.S. Senator John McCain during his Ukraine visit.

For others, Jeenbekov is a skilled politician, who has worked for both of Kyrgyzstan's ousted regimes and always assumed top positions ranging from a member of the government to Kyrgyzstan's Ambassador to Malaysia. Furthermore, critics assert that Jeenbekov was at the forefront of Kyrgyzstan's privatization in the 1990's while heading the State Agency for Property Development and that he privatized for himself a number of then state owned properties. In one of his speeches, Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev indirectly described Jeenbekov as a multi-millionaire, who made his fortune while working for the government. The President implied that in Kyrgyzstan, it is never possible to acquire wealth as a government official, unless one engages in corruption.

Time will tell how Kyrgyzstan's politics will evolve with a new player in its political arena. In the meantime, the United Opposition Movement is developing concrete plans to be presented in the near future.