

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 16 NO. 20
29 OCTOBER 2014

Contents

Analytical Articles

**REAFFIRMING BALANCE: KAZAKHSTAN'S EXPANDED FOREIGN POLICY
STRATEGY AND ITS RESPONSE** 3
S. Frederick Starr

**RUSSIAN-PROPOSED TREATY WITH ABKHAZIA UNRAVELS HOPES FOR
RAPPROCHEMENT WITH GEORGIA** 7
Johanna Popjanevski and Carolin Funke

**BETWEEN PROSPERITY AND THE TALIBAN: WILL IS TIP THE BALANCE IN
TURKMENISTAN?** 11
Micha'el Tanchum

**MOSCOW'S DIVIDE AND RULE POLICY IN DAGESTAN RESULTS IN MUCH DIVIDE
BUT LITTLE RULE** 15
Valeriy Dzutsev

Field Reports

RUSSIA COURTS AZERBAIJAN FOR CASPIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY SYSTEM 18
Mina Muradova

FORMER TAJIK MINISTER FACES ADDITIONAL CHARGES 21
Oleg Salimov

MOSCOW AND SUKHUMI TO SIGN NEW AGREEMENT 23
Eka Janashia

KYRGYZSTAN DEBATES CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE 25
Arslan Sabymbekov

THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

Editor: Svante E. Cornell

Associate Editor: Niklas Nilsson

Assistant Editor, News Digest: Alima Bissenova

Chairman, Editorial Board: S. Frederick Starr

The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English-language journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing Central Asia and the Caucasus. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports, however authors are encouraged to suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in The Analyst, described below.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what authors write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1,100-1,500 word analytical article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, The Analyst does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

The Editor reserves the right to edit the article to conform to the editorial policy and specifications of The Analyst and to reject the article should it not be acceptable to our editorial committee for publication. On acceptance and publication of the edited version of the article, The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies will issue an honorarium to the author. It is up to the individual author to provide the correct paperwork to the Institute that makes the issuing of an honorarium possible. The copyright for the article or field report will reside with the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. However, the author may use all or part of the contracted article in any book or article in any media subsequently written by the author, provided that a copyright notice appears giving reference to the contracted article's first publication by the "Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies."

Submission Guidelines:

Analytical Articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,100 and 1,500 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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.

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.

Svante E. Cornell

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University
1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.
Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

REAFFIRMING BALANCE: KAZAKHSTAN'S EXPANDED FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY AND ITS RESPONSE

S. Frederick Starr

Kazakhstan may have not had a choice as to whether or not to join the Customs Union, given geographical realities and President Nazarbayev's long advocacy of that course. Now that it is joining, however, Kazakhstan has advanced a new strategy that seeks to rescue and preserve its "balanced" or "multi-vectored" foreign policy and to extend it beyond geopolitics into economics and security. This requires the full engagement of the EU and U.S. The EU's October 2014, Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Kazakhstan advances this goal in the economic realm, but does not touch security. The U.S. has yet to take make similar advances in its economic or security relations with Kazakhstan.

BACKGROUND: The foreign policy of post-independence Kazakhstan began with several seemingly contradictory measures. On the one hand, Kazakhstan immediately joined the Commonwealth of Independent States and has been at the forefront of its integration efforts. Simultaneously, it reached out to the West with its renunciation of nuclear arms, and to the East with the establishment, at the end of 1992, of a Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia.

Kazakhstan's government was quick to claim that these initiatives were complementary, not conflicting. Another round of apparent contradictions followed. It was President Nazarbayev who, during a speech at Moscow University in 1994, proposed the creation of a regional trade block with Russia and even spoke of integration in the area of security. But within three years, the Kazakh government was also moving to

embrace Kassym -Jomart Tokayev's concept, set forth in his *Pod Stulagom Nezavissimosti*, of a "multi-vectored" or "balanced" foreign policy. Again, the Kazakh government insisted that these were in fact complementary, and intended to boost rather than erode Kazakhstan's sovereignty and self-government. Tokayev later served twice as Foreign Minister, and is now Chairman of the Senate.



(Source: EEAS, via [Flickr](#), CC 2.0)

This pattern of seemingly contradictory moves that are in fact intended to be complementary and to undergird rather than undermine Kazakhstan's

sovereignty has been played out in recent months. On the one hand, President Nazarbayev signed papers committing the country to join Vladimir

Putin's Eurasian Economic Union at its opening on January 1, 2015. Defending this move, again at Moscow University, Nazarbayev stated that "...some experts and politicians scare the world community with talk of a mythical 'reincarnation' of the Soviet Union. I believe that arguments in this regard are ... baseless." As if seeking to underscore Nazarbayev's argument, by October 2014, Kazakhstan was signing a new "partnership and cooperation" pact with its biggest trading partner, the European Union.

Meanwhile, beginning with Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, and extending through Putin's unsuccessful effort to gain a military base in the Kyrgyz sector of the Ferghana Valley, there were disturbing indications that Putin and Nazarbayev were not on the same page. These culminated in the spring and summer of 2014 with Russia's conquest of Crimea and its proxy war in Ukraine. On August 14, speaking at the summer camp at Lake Seliger, Putin declared bluntly (while praising Nazarbayev) that "the Kazakhs never had statehood," and that most Kazakhs "want to be part of the big Russian world." The clear implication was that Kazakhstan's independent statehood could not and would not survive President Nazarbayev. A number of even more grossly inflammatory statements were made at the same time by prominent Russian politicians,

including Almaty-born Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

How can Kazakhstan – and by implication, other Central Asian states feeling similar pressures – deal with this? Astana has faced a choice of abandoning, qualifying, or reaffirming the notion of balance. It has clearly chosen reaffirmation.

Even though it may not have had an alternative to joining the Eurasian Union, Kazakhstan proposed nonetheless to reaffirm and preserve its principle of a balanced foreign policy by simultaneously strengthening its ties with its other three partners, China, Europe and the U.S..

In practice, this policy had always been mainly political, and had barely been extended into either the economic or security realms. By reaffirming it in the summer of 2014, Kazakhstan in effect announced that it intends to broaden it to include these critically important spheres. Indeed, it is clear that anything short of this would have the effect of weakening Kazakhstan's sovereignty and self-determination.

IMPLICATIONS: Kazakhstan's bold yet utterly rational strategy remains, for the time being, a statement of aspiration rather than a concrete reality. Beyond doubt, its cooperation pact with the EU is a first victory for this approach, as is the web of agreements and investments that today link China and Kazakhstan. Yet the reality is that the EU agreement deals mainly with economics, touches on governance only in the sensitive area of democratization, and pertains not at all to security. The Chinese relationship,

by contrast, is heavy on economics, light on security, and nonexistent in the political sphere.

Kazakhstan's reaffirmed and expanded strategy implies that it must somehow engage Europe more actively in the security sphere and China more actively in the political sphere, and also security. Stated in the converse, if China, the EU and the U.S. do not step up and deepen their links with Kazakhstan in the areas identified above, they will face the reality of a geopolitically strengthened Russia and a Kazakhstan that aspires to sovereignty and self-government under the new regional realities but lacks the international support necessary for their maintenance on a sustained basis.

How, then, does this affect the future of U.S.-Kazakhstan relations? The central reality, pointed out by the recent publication *Looking Forward: Kazakhstan and the United States*, is that Kazakhstan nurtures expanded expectations of the U.S. in the economic and security spheres at the very time when the U.S. appears to many to be disengaging from Central Asia as part of its shift away from Afghanistan in favor of East Asia. The authors qualify this oft-heard claim, offering evidence of continuing engagement and even deepening engagement in some areas. Yet in the end they find much evidence of U.S. disengagement or, more precisely, of continuing engagement that is vitiated by the absence of any clear, long-term, and firm strategic underpinnings.

Looking Forward concludes with a series of recommendations for both Kazakhstan and the US. These steps, in the spheres of economics, politics, and security, are not financially onerous for either party but cannot be advanced by either side without reciprocal steps from the other. Such measures include the abolition of the Jackson-Vanick Amendment, the opening of U.S. markets to key Kazakh products, the removal of existing impediments to American investments beyond the energy sector; a willingness of the U.S. to advance its concern for democratization, human rights, and religious freedom by working *with* Kazakhstan rather than *on* it; a willingness by Kazakhstan to work out practical solutions in these areas; and the expansion of military-to-military ties. Finally, the authors from both countries believe that a presidential visit to Kazakhstan and the region is an essential response to those fearing a U.S. withdrawal.

In setting forth these proposals, the experts from Kazakhstan and the U.S. agreed that both countries should nest their bi-lateral relationship in a *regional* approach. This means that Kazakhstan must strengthen its links with its Central Asian neighbors and the U.S. should avoid treating Central Asia as a series of differentiated bilateral relationships. Both countries, and their neighbors as well, have an interest in stabilizing and developing Afghanistan, and both can together set a useful example by undertaking practical, private sector initiatives in Afghanistan and 2014.

CONCLUSIONS: Elements of this analysis have been set forth by others (see the [03/20/2013](#) and [11/27/2013](#) issues of the CACI Analyst). Its implications are sobering. If Kazakhstan's approach is vindicated, it will strengthen the entire region, and in a manner compatible with the *legitimate* concerns of all neighbors, including Russia. If it is not vindicated in practice, the U.S. must be prepared to face a situation in which what is today Central Asia's most successful economy is hampered and destabilized by eroding sovereignty, a process that is bound to spread to the region as a whole. Any realistic approach by the U.S. must be mindful not only of the potential gains of action along the lines set forth above, but of the potential losses and heightened instability if such actions are not taken.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. S. Frederick Starr is Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center.

RUSSIAN-PROPOSED TREATY WITH ABKHAZIA UNRAVELS HOPES FOR RAPPROCHEMENT WITH GEORGIA

Johanna Popjanevski and Carolin Funke

Georgia's relations with Russia and its breakaway region of Abkhazia have deteriorated in recent months. Moscow-loyal Raul Khajimba's ascent to power after the August presidential election in Abkhazia, followed by Russia's proposed treaty on "alliance and integration" with Abkhazia, have given rise to concerns of a Russian annexation of the region and put both Georgia's reconciliation process with Abkhazia and its attempts to normalize relations with Moscow at stake. In order to avoid a Ukraine-like scenario, Georgia's Western allies must respond adequately to current developments. The Georgian government and opposition must also overcome their differences and adopt a united front regarding the common goal of restoring Georgia's territorial integrity.

BACKGROUND: In late May, Abkhazia's *de facto* president Alexandr Ankvab stepped down following a series of opposition street protests led by Russia's favored candidate Raul Khajimba, and called for snap elections. Khajimba, a graduate of Minsk's KGB academy, narrowly avoided a runoff in the August election by securing 50.57 per cent of the votes – a dubious victory as almost 20,000 ethnic Georgians were stripped of their Abkhaz passports ahead of the election, preventing them from voting. Within a week after the election, Khajimba announced his intention to enhance ties with Moscow through a new cooperative treaty between Sukhumi and Moscow focused on security guarantees for the breakaway region. Khajimba also declared his intention to close four out

of five cross-border checkpoints along the Inguri River that divides Abkhazia from Georgia proper, leaving only the main checkpoint operational and, as such, greatly limiting exchange between Gali, inhabited by ethnic Georgians, and the Zugdidi area.

One month later, a Russian-drafted version of the planned treaty was leaked, proposing significant changes to the security structures in Abkhazia. The document "on alliance and integration" entails placing the Abkhazian army border officials and interior ministry under Russian command, essentially undermining any autonomy of the Abkhazian military and law enforcement agencies. Importantly, the treaty posits that Abkhazia should simplify the process for granting Russian citizens

Abkhazian citizenship, essentially enabling Russians to purchase land and property in the region. In exchange, Russia offers to provide Abkhazia enhanced security guarantees by protecting the Abkhazian-Georgian administrative borderline along the Inguri River; to increase social benefits to Russian passport holders in the region and to step up trade relations to improve the region's economy.



(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), GNU 1.2)

Tbilisi has reacted with concern to the proposed agreement. On October 17, Georgia's Parliament responded by condemning the treaty, referring to it as an annexation attempt by Russia, a threat to regional stability and to the process of normalization of Russian-Georgian relations. Individual representatives of the Georgian government have also objected to the document. Defense Minister Irakli Alasania stated that very aggressive – meaning active – foreign policy actions are now called for. Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili also expressed his concern about the treaty, referring to it as “alarming” and, notably, a threat to Abkhazia's self-determination and struggle for recognition. The leading opposition United National Movement party reacted strongly to the PM's statement, pointing to the irrationality

behind statements in favor of Abkhazian sovereignty, given Georgia's long-standing ambition to reintegrate the region with Georgia.

With the exception of some individual countries, Georgia's Western allies have been modest in their reaction to the recent statements. U.S. ambassador Richard Norland restated U.S. support for Georgia's territorial integrity but added that “it's a little hard to imagine more integration [of Abkhazia with Russia] than here already is.” At a Friends of Georgia meeting in Luxemburg on October 21, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius stated that “We must condemn and stand against any attempt aimed to legalize the annexation of Georgian territories. All these efforts are the logical continuation of what Russia is doing in other regions, for example in Crimea.”

The draft agreement has caused unease also in Sukhumi. Shortly after the treaty proposal was made official, on October 16 the Abkhazian parliament convened to review the wording of the treaty and present an Abkhazian version of the draft. In a televised address on October 23, Khajimba announced that Russia's proposal differs with Sukhumi's view on several points and should not be viewed as being imposed on Abkhazia.

IMPLICATIONS: Khajimba's victory in the August election, followed by the proposed treaty on further integration of Abkhazia with Russia, suggests that Moscow is increasing its political, as opposed to just military, influence in the region. Indeed, Russia

has found it decidedly more difficult to gain a political foothold in Abkhazia than in for instance South Ossetia, where virtually the entire leadership is made up of Russian security personnel. In particular, Khajimba's defeat against pro-independence candidates in three out of four presidential elections over the last decade testifies to the region's preference for independence over closer integration with Russia.

Nonetheless, Russia has remained persistent in attempting to install Moscow-loyal representatives in the Abkhaz leadership. When Khajimba was defeated by Sergei Bagapsh in 2004, Russia closed its border with Abkhazia for days until a compromise was reached through which Khajimba was offered the role of vice president. In a clear attempt to win over votes from the pro-independence camp, over the course of the 2014 election campaign Khajimba attempted to shake off his image as a Russian mouthpiece, portraying himself instead as a protector of Abkhaz independence, which likely secured him the election victory.

The newly elected leader will now have to balance the interests of Moscow with those of the Abkhazian people, who largely remain in favor of full independence. Such signs are already visible as the proposed treaty has given rise to strong objections from civil society organizations and local media who view it as a threat to Abkhazian sovereignty. However, while the Abkhazian leadership has been clear that it does not accept the agreement in its current format, negotiations with

Moscow over its key points will most probably result in concessions from Sukhumi's side. The property rights issue in particular is likely to become contentious, as the current legislation prohibiting foreigners from buying property and settling in the region has been an important means for the Abkhazian authorities to preserve its current demographic advantage and to prevent the region from exploitation by Russian investors. As the region constitutes a potentially attractive spot for Russian tourism, Russia is unlikely to compromise on this issue.

Tbilisi too has reason to worry about the current developments. The implications for the Georgian leadership are two-fold: first, Abkhazia's further integration with Russia constitutes a serious setback for Georgia's campaign to reintegrate Abkhazia with Georgia and ensure the return of IDPs to the region. Second, the Georgian Dream coalition that came to power in 2012 has sought to improve relations between Tbilisi and Moscow through, for instance, appointing Zurab Abashidze as a special envoy to engage in direct talks with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin.

For the same reason, Tbilisi has been careful in its response to both Russian actions in Ukraine and Khajimba's victory in August. However, Sukhumi's announcement to close the Inguri crossing points and Russia's treaty proposal has led Tbilisi to significantly sharpen its rhetoric, indicating that it may withdraw from the Abashidze-Karasin talks. The

Georgian government, just like the Abkhazian, is facing a significant challenge in weighing its ambition to normalize relations with Moscow against the quest of restoring Georgia's territorial integrity, which remains a priority in the view of the Georgian public. The current events are also causing domestic controversies as the opposition is pushing for a more determined government response to Russia's annexation attempts. The United National Movement has recently announced that a protest rally against the government's inaction will take place in Tbilisi in mid-November.

The recent events coincide with another worrying development for Tbilisi. Since July, the Dagestani authorities have invested US\$ 730 million into rebuilding the Avaro-Kakhetian road, an 83-kilometer motorway that will constitute an additional access point from Russia to Georgia other than through the Larsi checkpoint, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While the official pretext for the project is to enhance economic relations between Makhachkala and Tbilisi, the road may equally serve as a military transport route from Russia to Georgia proper. The Georgian government has from the outset regarded the project as a security threat, and recently announced that no plans exist for rebuilding the road on the Georgian side. Whether or not the road project is intended to facilitate another Russian military operation in Georgia, its implementation is causing unease in Tbilisi, especially in light of the developments in Ukraine.

CONCLUSIONS: Moscow's treaty proposal, for all purposes an attempt to integrate Abkhazia with the Russian Federation, underline the urgent need for a firm response to Russia's assertive policies in the region, both from the West and Tbilisi. Moscow has taken note of the weak international response to its annexation of Crimea and aggression in Eastern Ukraine and displays a continuous interest in stirring unrest in the region rather than engaging in constructive dialogue or peace efforts. Moscow is also aware of the fragile political environment in Tbilisi caused by the ongoing controversies between the government and opposition – fuelled by a series of arrests of former government officials, including former president Mikheil Saakashvili who is arrested in absentia on a number of charges. A weak and divided political scene in Tbilisi risks inviting Russian infiltration into Georgian politics and provocative Russian steps in relation Georgia's unresolved conflicts. Thus, it is more necessary than ever before that Georgia's political forces coordinate their approaches to national interests and security and adopt a united strategy in relation to Abkhazia.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Johanna Popjanevski is Deputy Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. Carolin Funke is an independent analyst based in Germany. She was an intern with the Central-Asia Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center in 2013.

BETWEEN PROSPERITY AND THE TALIBAN: WILL IS TIP THE BALANCE IN TURKMENISTAN?

Micha'el Tanchum

While energy-rich Turkmenistan is poised to become the next economic tiger of Central Asia, it has come under a growing threat from the Taliban since NATO's troop drawdown in neighboring Afghanistan. Forces from the Taliban and various multi-ethnic, Central Asian jihadist militias associated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) have been concentrating in northern Afghanistan near the Turkmenistan border, producing unprecedented border clashes with Turkmenistan's military during 2014. IMU leader Usman Ghazi's recent declaration of allegiance to the Islamic State raises the concern that the Islamic State might assist the opening of a new jihadist front.

BACKGROUND: With the world's fourth largest proven reserves of natural gas, currently estimated at 24.3 trillion cubic meters, along with an estimated 80.6 billion barrels of oil in unproven reserves, Turkmenistan is poised to follow Kazakhstan as Central Asia's next energy exporting economic tiger. In January 2014, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov announced that his government would intensify its efforts to raise foreign investment in Turkmenistan's energy sector to achieve the government's goal of doubling Turkmenistan's natural gas production by 2020 on the way to achieving an annual production rate of 250 billion cubic meters (bcm) by 2030.

Designating most of the increased gas production for export, Turkmenistan seeks to emulate the success of Kazakhstan's energy export-driven economic development program that

produced a tenfold increase in Kazakhstan's per capita income within a decade. Following Kazakhstan's pattern of a carefully constructed "multi-vectored" foreign trade policy, Ashgabat is seeking to maintain its autonomy from Russia by deepening its economic relationship with China, counterbalanced by developing its economic cooperation with the European Union and Turkey.

Like Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan's sustained growth will be reliant on its relationship with China. A consortium led by China's state-owned National Petroleum Company (CNPC) developed Turkmenistan's Galkynysh gas field, the world's second largest. CNPC will be the sole service contractor for the second development phase at Galkynysh. Signaling Turkmenistan's strategic cooperation with China's Silk Road Economic Belt initiative, Ashgabat and Beijing signed

the *China-Turkmenistan Friendly Cooperation Agreement* in May 2014. As part of the Sino-Turkmen relationship, Ashgabat will supply Beijing with over 65 bcm of natural gas, constituting twenty percent of China's gas imports. To increase Turkmenistan's export capacity to China, the Central Asia-China gas pipeline will expand with the construction of two additional lines traversing different routes from Turkmenistan to China's Xinjiang province.



(Source: Vladimir Komarov, Turkmenistan.gov.tm)

Turkmenistan also represents an important alternative source of natural gas for both EU members and Turkey as they seek to alleviate their dependency on Russian imports. Turkmen natural gas is expected to reach Europe via Turkey through the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), which is expected to become operational in 2018. Turkey's Energy Minister Taner Yıldız has already publically declared Ankara's intention to incorporate 5-6 bcm of Turkmen natural gas into the TANAP project. As Turkmenistan seeks to diversify its natural gas export markets via TANAP in order to maintain its autonomy from the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union,

Turkmenistan has deepened its cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan. On May 26, 2014, the foreign ministers of Turkmenistan, Turkey, and Azerbaijan conducted their first-ever trilateral meeting. Held in the Azerbaijani capital of Baku, the summit represented an important milestone in the rapprochement between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. Focused on enhancing energy and security cooperation, the foreign ministers agreed to hold trilateral meetings biannually and develop a two-year "action plan," which will be discussed at their next meeting in Turkmenistan's capital, Ashgabat.

Additionally, in October 2014, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) commissioned a feasibility study for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline as part of the ADB's effort to establish a consortium to construct the pipeline by 2018. The so-called "Peace Pipeline" will economically benefit all the participating nations, particularly energy-starved Afghanistan and Pakistan.

IMPLICATIONS: With its rich resources and its geostrategic role in providing affordable and reliable supplies of energy to regions as diverse as Turkey, Afghanistan and Xinjiang, Turkmenistan is an attractive target of opportunity for jihadist militants operating in the larger Turkic world. Turkmenistan's regular military stands at about 30,000, with recent estimates suggesting that its ground forces consists of 18,500 soldiers. Similarly, Turkmenistan has a small air force

consisting of only two squadrons of fighter aircraft. While capable of repelling incursions of small armed groups, Turkmenistan would be unable to withstand a sustained offensive by a larger force of jihadists.

The upswing in militant violence against Turkmenistan began in February 2014 as Taliban forces crossed the Turkmenistan border from Afghanistan and clashed with Turkmenistan's military, leaving three soldiers dead and two wounded. Although the Taliban leadership subsequently renounced the attacks and blamed local Afghan warlords, Turkmenistan replaced its regular border troops with elite Special Forces. Turkmenistan shares a 744 kilometer border with Afghanistan. This border region, encompassing the provinces of Jowzjan, Faryab, Badghis, and Herat on the Afghan side is home to one million Turkmens. Anticipating a new round of instability in its border regions, Ashgabat began contemplating the possibility of placing troops on the Afghan side of the border as a buffer zone in order to prevent further incursions and support the local Afghan Turkmen population.

In April, hundreds of Taliban fighters swept into Faryab province capturing thirteen villages. Renewed clashes between Turkmenistan's military and Taliban broke out in May, resulting in the deaths of three soldiers. In June, Turkmenistan's military reportedly began the construction of fenced ditches and armed check points along the border starting in Faryab province, leaving the local Turkmen population

in Afghanistan to their own fate. The Taliban and allied jihadist groups control large segments of the border in Faryab and Baghdis provinces. In August, additional clashes reportedly occurred farther north in Jowzjan province, involving approximately 100 Taliban fighters.

The Taliban push into Central Asia from Afghanistan is being coordinated with militias associated with the IMU. The IMU's renewed focus on Central Asia is partially the result of a Pakistani military offensive in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Pakistan's Operation Zarb-e Azb was launched in response to the June 7, 2014 terrorist attack on Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, conducted by Central Asian fighters affiliated with the IMU and coordinated by the Pakistani Taliban. Pakistan's military offensive focused on the North Waziristan militant strongholds of Miranshah and Mir Ali where IMU fighters are based, causing the Central Asian jihadi militias to refocus their operations to Afghanistan and the bordering nations of Central Asia.

Recognizing the emerging threat, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) sent trainers to Turkmenistan in late August. The 45-day OSCE course focused on providing officers from Turkmenistan's State Border Service with high level education in tactical patrolling to improve their units' skills in detecting and interdicting illegal cross-border movements. Maintaining 12,000 personnel, Turkmenistan's State

Border Service is about one-third of the size of the regular forces of the Turkmenistan's army and constitutes a critical part of the nation's defenses against a large-scale, militant offensive.

CONCLUSIONS: Due to its long border with Afghanistan and its weak security forces, Turkmenistan is vulnerable to a jihadist offensive. Many fighters from the Islamic State (IS) hail from Central Asia and the Caucasus. In addition to the prospect of attaining vast energy resources, Turkmenistan's geography offers the added appeal for IS of opening a corridor into the region. Consonant with their high battle tempo on the tactical level, IS has already demonstrated a strategic proclivity for quickly opening new fronts when their progress is stymied in a particular area. As IS is being pushed back in Iraq and has become bogged down in the battle for Kobane in Syria, it may turn its attention to Central Asia. Lacking a significant defense relationship with either Russia or the U.S., Turkmenistan represents the soft underbelly of the Central Asia-Caucasus region. Given the IMU's new affiliation with IS and IS's own large contingent of fighters from the broader region, a reasonable possibility exists that IS would support an IMU-Taliban offensive on Turkmenistan. Bolstered by IS support, that would provide a serious challenge to Turkmenistan's outmatched security forces.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Micha'el Tanchum is a Fellow in the Middle East and Asia Units, [Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace](#), Hebrew University. Dr. Tanchum also

teaches in the Departments of Middle Eastern History and the Faculty of Law, Tel Aviv University.

MOSCOW'S DIVIDE AND RULE POLICY IN DAGESTAN RESULTS IN MUCH DIVIDE BUT LITTLE RULE

Valeriy Dzutsev

Moscow's new envoy to the North Caucasus, Sergei Melikov, is flexing his administrative muscles and challenging Dagestan's Head, Ramazan Abdulatipov. Abdulatipov's opponents at the republican level also seem determined to seek the resignation of the republican governor. The counterterrorist operation regime has become endemic in some areas of Dagestan and the government's promises to crack down on the hotbeds of insurgency have produced few results. The sense of a systemic crisis of governance is increasing in the republic as the current governor is running out of time to implement long-promised reforms.

BACKGROUND: Moscow's new envoy to the North Caucasus, Sergei Melikov, was appointed in May, 2014. Though Melikov's responsibilities included seven territories in the North Caucasian Federal District, it was clear from the outset that the new official would focus primarily on Dagestan. This easternmost republic in the Russian North Caucasus has been the most volatile in the past years, accounting for the majority of casualties in insurgency-related violence. Dagestan with its population of about 3 million is the largest territory in the North Caucasus. The republic is made up of numerous ethnic groups and is predominantly Muslim.

Dagestan's deteriorating security situation forced Moscow to replace the republic's Head, Magomedshah Magomedov, with the Moscow-based politician of Dagestani origin and Soviet era functionary Abdulatipov in

January 2013. Magomedov managed to survive in office only for three years from February 2010 to January 2013, when he unexpectedly resigned. Abdulatipov proclaimed fighting corruption in Dagestan as one of his primary goals. The flamboyant leader sacked and sidelined numerous officials, including the Dagestani heavyweight politician and mayor of Makhachkala Said Amirov. However, it appeared over time that Abdulatipov either replaced the old corrupt elites with new corrupt officials or simply shuffled the same cohort of bureaucrats.

Dagestan's complex ethnic composition gives an ethnic color to all political moves in the republic. For example, Abdulatipov is an ethnic Avar, the largest ethnic group in the republic and his predecessor Magomedov was an ethnic Dargin, the second largest ethnic group in Dagestan. Incidentally, Moscow's new envoy Melikov is an

ethnic Lezgin, the fourth largest ethnic group of Dagestan, numbering close to 400,000 in the republic. Lezgins reside in the southern part of Dagestan, in the city of Derbent and surrounding territories. A significant number of Lezgins also reside across the border, in northern Azerbaijan.

Ongoing frictions between Dagestan's different ethnic groups have likely affected the relations between Melikov and Abdulatipov. Melikov has publicly criticized the Moscow-appointed Dagestani government for failing to contain the insurgency, which is unusual for Russian officials. Melikov's statements indicate that the Russian government is losing patience with Abdulatipov's experiments in Dagestan.

IMPLICATIONS: Domestically in the republic, the Dagestani branch of the Just Russia party (*Spravedlivaya Rossiya*) held a conference in Makhachkala in late September and called for drastic steps to oust Abdulatipov from office. The party members considered mass protests and hunger strikes, but eventually settled on sending a letter to Moscow, demanding to dismiss Abdulatipov. If the Russian leadership does not provide a "satisfactory" response within a month, the participants of the conference said, they would "start taking measures of their own." While the Just Russia party is normally considered to constitute a puppet party created by the Kremlin, in unstable and polarized Dagestan the local party branch fiercely opposes the governor

and is considered to be one of the most flamboyant opposition forces.



(Source: Presidential Press and Information Office, via kremlin.ru)

Dissatisfaction with the security situation and abuses by government forces have spread across Dagestan's political spectrum. The village of Gimry in Dagestan's Untsukul district is perhaps the epitome of the republic's persistent instability. The village with a population of about 4,500 has seen multiple counterterrorist operations in the past several years and even a partial relocation to the new shantytown Vremenny (Temporary). On occasion, the authorities have forgotten to cancel counterterrorism operation regimes already in force before reintroducing new ones. The government has used both collective punishment tactics and offered material incentives to locals in the area, but with few results so far. On October 19, government forces started to install barbed wire around the rebellious village. On October 22, the village was sealed off and no journalists are allowed into the area.

The Gimry tunnel was shut down on September 18, officially for five days in connection with a counterterrorist operation, but has not yet been reopened. The four kilometer tunnel is the longest road tunnel in Russia,

connecting Dagestan's mountainous areas and lowlands. It appears that the tunnel was closed not for preventing infiltration of militants, but rather to collectively punish the residents of Gimry and surrounding villages. Between October 2 and 8, government forces boasted of killing a total of ten militants in the village of Vremenny and the Shamilsky district.

Despite eliminating a numbers of suspected militants within just one week, no expert hails this as a great achievement that will have a lasting positive effect on the security situation in Dagestan. The reason for such pessimism is that there is very little information on who exactly was killed or what their role in the insurgency was. The killed individuals may not even have been members of the insurgency. On October 16, government forces killed Ramis Mirzakhanov, a deputy of the local district council in Tabasaran district in southern Dagestan, initially claiming that Mirzakhanov attacked the government forces. Independent investigators, however, said his death was unprovoked.

The government forces' violence against suspected insurgents in Dagestan is not targeted, but rather designed to instill terror in the population. Hence, even the elimination of dozens of suspects does little to improve the situation in the republic. The organizer of Just Russia's conference in Dagestan, Ruslan Rasulov said, "despite the fact that the police has intensified its fight against the extremist underground, the

situation does not improve. Regular mass arrests of Muslims, closure of [Muslim] daycares and schools, restricted access to mosques and compiling secret lists of Salafis have the opposite effect."

CONCLUSIONS: As the Dagestani population and elites become increasingly disappointed with governor Abdulatipov, they have started to seek an intervention from Moscow to change the regime in the republic. Abdulatipov has been in office for less than two years and the Russian leadership probably does not want to give the impression of haphazard decision-making by removing him now. Moscow's reluctance to replace Abdulatipov is already causing some Dagestani activists to blame the situation in the republic on the central government. Instead of dismissing its protégé in Makhachkala, Moscow appears to have created a parallel power center by appointing Melikov to correct and counterbalance Abdulatipov. The bureaucratic balancing, however, is already producing friction between the two men and does little to resolve the republic's problems. Given the blurred boundaries between the responsibilities of the officials and ethnic rivalry, the conflict between the two overseers of Moscow's policy in Dagestan will likely intensify over time.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Valeriy Dzutsev is a Senior Non-Resident Fellow at Jamestown Foundation and Doctoral Student in Political Science at Arizona State University.

RUSSIA COURTS AZERBAIJAN FOR CASPIAN COLLECTIVE SECURITY SYSTEM

Mina Muradova

Russia intends to create a “collective security” system on the Caspian Sea to step up its naval cooperation with Azerbaijan as Moscow seeks to limit the presence of foreign militaries on the Caspian Sea.

“We agreed on the principles of interaction ... This is a real breakthrough,” President Vladimir Putin said after the fourth Caspian summit in Astrakhan on September 29. According to Putin, the parties made progress in preparing the convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea “due to the coordination of key principles of the Caspian littoral states’ activity at sea.” These principles were reflected in a political statement signed by leaders of the five littoral states. According to Putin, the political statement “will become a cornerstone of the convention” and while he admitted that not all problems were settled in full, “their number has become far fewer.” The presidents managed to agree on clear formulations on the delimitation of water spaces, natural resources, and the regime of navigation and fisheries.

The Caspian Sea is a unique water area in terms of its ecology, which includes more than 500 kinds of sea plants and 854 kinds of fish species, including the Caspian sturgeon. The Sea contains an estimated 18 billion tons of hydrocarbon resources, with proven reserves of four billion tons.

The statement confirms the exclusive right of the littoral states’ armed forces to conduct military activity in the Caspian Sea as one of the fundamental principles for ensuring security and stability. “Such a regime was historically established. We’re not going to change it,” Putin said, adding that the five littoral states intend to solve all problems of the Caspian region exclusively among themselves.

Baku welcomed the results of the summit and Deputy Foreign Minister Khalaf Khalafov told journalists that the signed documents “fully meet” Azerbaijan’s national interests and do not contradict national legislation. “The basic principles of the agreements – the creation of a stable balance of weapons, taking into account the interests of littoral countries while carrying out military exercises in the sea, complying with the measures of mutual trust and meet Azerbaijan’s interests,” Khalafov said.

Azerbaijan’s compliance appears to be a primary objective of Russia’s Caspian policy, as this Caucasian country has relied mostly on U.S. advice in building its navy. Russia’s Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Baku on October 13, two weeks after the presidents of the five Caspian states agreed to prevent the military presence of non-littoral states in the Caspian Sea. Reporting on Shoigu’s visit, RIA Novosti framed it

as part of a concerted “Eastern foreign policy direction” to counter the effects of the Ukraine crisis: “For Russia the results of the [Caspian] summit were yet another remarkable success for the Eastern foreign policy direction that is taking place in the wake of a serious worsening of relations with the West as a result of the events around Ukraine. Earlier this year Moscow achieved a historic gas agreement with Beijing. It also managed to seriously advance the development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which India and Pakistan will join next year.”

Shoigu’s visit is considered as the first active defense contact between the two nations after Azerbaijan and Russia failed to reach an agreement to extend the lease of the radar station in Gabala. “Now the period of disagreements seems to have been overcome with varying degrees of success, evidenced by intensive military and technical cooperation between the two countries,” *Moskovsky Komsomolets* newspaper said referring to a source in the Russian defense ministry.

At present, the two countries are carrying out a program for developing cooperation in the military and military-technical fields for 2013-2016. 57 Azerbaijani servicemen are studying at the Russian Defense Ministry’s schools. According to Shoigu, “Education and training of personnel is a very serious task due to the supplies of military hardware for the Azerbaijani army within the military-technical cooperation” while cooperation in the Caspian Sea between the Russian and

Azerbaijani navies is “a very important aspect.”

Shoigu’s delegation included the Russian navy’s top commander Viktor Chirkov, who met with President Ilham Aliyev and his counterpart, Defense Minister Zakir Hasanov. At the meeting, Shoigu termed Azerbaijan a “strategic partner of Russia” and the two Defense Ministers signed a plan on cooperation for 2015. Shoigu said that “everything connected with the Caspian is important to Russia,” and later confirmed that Russia’s agreements with Azerbaijan include joint military maneuvers in the Caspian Sea to be carried out in 2015.

Shoigu said the documents establish cooperation on army-command training and maritime tactical exercises. He also discussed with his Azerbaijani counterpart the possibility of creating a collective security system for the Caspian states, which could as a “first step” include joint measures to prevent maritime and air incidents.

The U.S. State Department commented on the Caspian summit declaration that it does not intend to change its military cooperation with Baku. According to State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki, “We have seen the joint statement issued by the Caspian Five that, among other things, calls for the non-presence of armed forces in the Caspian Sea not belonging to one of the Caspian Five countries ... We maintain a strong security cooperation relationship with Azerbaijan, focusing on border security, counterterrorism, NATO interoperability, and its capacity to

contribute peacekeepers to international missions. We do not anticipate the Caspian Five joint statement will change that.”

FORMER TAJIK MINISTER FACES ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Oleg Salimov

Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon continues persecution of his former Minister of Industry, businessman, and politician Zaid Saidov. On October 16, Tajikistan's Anticorruption Agency raised several new criminal charges against Saidov, who already serves a 26-year prison term as of December 2013. Presumed by Rakhmon to be a potential political challenger, Saidov was convicted on charges of rape, polygamy, fraud, and bribery. The new charges include document forgery; abuse of office; misappropriation; illegal actions towards property subject to inventory, arrest, or confiscation; and tax evasion. The abuse of office was among the first charges pressed against Saidov at the moment of his arrest. However, when announcing the verdict, the court ordained this charge to supplementary examination. The cumulative punishment for the new charges against Saidov envisions up to 15 additional years of imprisonment.

Saidov's rapid downfall was provoked by his announced intention to organize a new political party in Tajikistan, which was supposed to focus on addressing the concerns of business owners and entrepreneurs. The criminal charges against Saidov were brought up soon after the announcement, resulting in his arrest in May 2013 (see [04/09/2013 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)). His ensuing

conviction to a 26 year prison term and the confiscation of his property was widely seen by local and international human rights organizations as a punishment for political initiative and a warning to other potential challengers to Rakhmon.

Tajikistan's Supreme Court rejected Saidov's appeal in May 2014. After losing the appeal, the lawyers representing Saidov were determined to obtain an assertion of their client's innocence in the International Court of Human Rights. The lawyers also consecutively criticized the Anticorruption agency for fabricating its case against Saidov and Tajik courts for ignoring the defenders' arguments, evidence, and relevant materials. According to Saidov's lawyers, the takeover of numerous successful businesses belonging to Saidov is another motive behind his conviction and the new charges. At the moment of his arrest, Saidov owned and co-owned 13 business enterprises ranging from fertilizers to light industry and education. Some of the businesses, including the large company TajikAzot were confiscated soon after the conviction. The new charges aim to expropriate Saidov's remaining assets as well as punishing all individuals connected to him.

Saidov's lawyers were among the first victims, as two out of three were accused by the Anticorruption agency

of committing fraud and bribery. Fakhriddin Zakirov was arrested in March 2014 and Shukhrat Kudratov in July 2014. Previously, Saidov's lawyers reported receiving warnings, threats, and harassment while working on Saidov's case. A day before his arrest, Kudratov published an open letter stating the political motives for Saidov's conviction sanctioned by the country's top political elite. Just like the trial against Saidov, Zakirov's case, which started on October 3, is conducted behind closed doors with no reporters or journalists allowed. The international Commission of Jurists in Switzerland expressed grave concerns regarding the persecution of Saidov's lawyers due to their client's political views. Two new lawyers will join Saidov's team of defenders, replacing Zakirov and Kudratov who are still under arrest.

Saidov's relatives are also targeted by Rakhmon's regime. In August 2014, the Anticorruption agency initiated a document forgery case against Zaid Saidov's son Khairullo. In January this year, the Higher Economic Court of Tajikistan reopened a case against Saidov's other son, Khurshed, accusing him of illegal gain of property. In August 2013, Saidov's friends and relatives took part in a symbolic action of support releasing one hundred white pigeons and balloons with Saidov's portrait. They were soon arrested and spent several days in jail on charges of hooliganism.

The latest charges against Saidov involve 14 alleged accomplices including 6 unnamed city of Dushanbe

officials. The assumed criminal ring headed by Saidov is suspected of financial manipulations and misuse of funds allocated for construction purposes. The group is also accused of repeated tax evasion.

There is a high probability that the 56-year-old Saidov will spend the rest of his life in prison. Besides losing his freedom, Saidov will be deprived of all his financial assets. New charges will likely continue to emerge until President Rakhmon is fully ascertained of Saidov's complete political and financial destruction. Saidov's case demonstrates that Rakhmon's regime is determined to annihilate all potential opposition in Tajikistan while acquiring considerable financial assets from convicted persons, and does not shy from targeting business, personal, and political companions and manipulating the legal system in the process.

MOSCOW AND SUKHUMI TO SIGN NEW AGREEMENT

Eka Janashia

The Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia intend to sign a Kremlin-proposed new agreement “On Alliance and Integration” by the end of October. The draft agreement further limits Abkhazia’s nominal independence in its relationship with Russia by circumscribing its competence to pursue defense and security policies. The publicized provisions of the document triggered reactions apprehensions in Sokhumi as well as Tbilisi.

The draft agreement foresees the introduction of a “common defense infrastructure,” a “combined group of forces” and “joint measures for border protection” to replace existing Abkhazian ones. Abkhazia’s Army, as an autonomous unit, will be replaced with a Combined Group of Forces (CGF) of the Russian and Abkhaz armed forces with joint command and defense infrastructure. In wartime, the commander of CGF will be appointed by Russia’s ministry of defense while citizens of Abkhazia will be able to serve on a contractual basis in Russian military units deployed in the breakaway region. The draft treaty also involves a “collective defense” clause obliging the sides to provide necessary support in case of attack.

The document also envisages a shift of the Russia-Abkhazia de facto border from the Psou River – at the de jure frontier between Russia and Georgia –

to the Inguri River, which divides Abkhazia from Georgia proper. Moscow assumes the responsibility to protect the “Abkhaz state border with Georgia” by imposing “joint control” on the movement of people, transport and cargo in Abkhazia’s custom offices including ports.

Meanwhile, the draft treaty posits that Sokhumi will align its customs legislation with Eurasian Economic Union regulations and procedures, and synchronize its budgetary and tax laws with those of Russia in pre-defined time frame. In turn, the Kremlin commits to support Abkhazia’s international recognition, making it eligible for accession into international organizations.

To mitigate its obvious attempt to annex the region, Moscow pledges to increase the salaries of employees at state agencies and pensions for Russian citizens residing in Abkhazia. Notably, possessing Russian passports, the majority of Abkhazia’s residents are Russian citizens. Moscow promises to integrate these people into Russia’s federal compulsory health insurance system, which will allow them access to Russian healthcare services.

Despite extensive social assurances, the draft agreement triggered concerns in Abkhazia’s political and civil society circles. Even incumbent officials of the de facto republic stated a need to revise

the document, which will otherwise lead to the loss of Abkhazia's sovereignty. The fragility of opposition forces in Abkhazia, however, makes considerable changes to the draft unlikely.

Tbilisi termed the document a "step towards annexation" of Abkhazia by the Kremlin. Georgia's PM Irakli Gharibashvili said that "this [treaty] is directly contrary to their [Abkhazians] 25-year struggle for self-determination, recognition and so-called independence." Gharibashvili's statement was strongly criticized by most Georgian opposition politicians and analysts. The ethnic cleansing and expulsion of Georgians from their homes deprives Abkhazia of a right to "self-determination" and the use of this term by Georgia's PM could legitimize Abkhazia's struggle for independence, the opponents asserted.

Meanwhile, Georgia's parliament did not support the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party's demand to abolish the Karasin-Abashidze format. Bilateral talks between the Georgian PM's special envoy for relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, and Russia's deputy foreign minister Grigory Karasin have taken place since December 2012 and mainly focuses on economic and trade issues. Tbilisi should express its protest to Moscow by repealing the format, UNM claimed.

Moscow termed Tbilisi's reaction to the proposed treaty an "unscrupulous and dangerous speculation," which may thwart the Geneva discussions, launched after the Russia-Georgia

August war. For Tbilisi, maintaining the international platform provided by the Geneva talks is vitally important, as the format recognizes Russia as a party to the conflict. The Geneva talks also allow Georgia to discuss conflict related issues at the international level with the engagement of the EU, OSCE, and the UN, as well as the U.S. For the same reasons, Moscow is interested in thwarting the Geneva talks and instead reinforce direct, bilateral ties with Tbilisi.

The draft agreement proposed by the Kremlin will diminish any illusions that may have existed in Abkhazia regarding the region's ability to attain sovereignty. The move will also test both Tbilisi's capability to consolidate international pressure against Russia and Sokhumi's strength to resist Moscow.

KYRGYZSTAN DEBATES CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Arslan Sabyrbekov

Initiatives to amend Kyrgyzstan's constitution, adopted in the aftermath of the April 2010 events and transforming the country into the first semi-parliamentarian state in Central Asia, are again on the rise. In the past month, a number of prominent politicians have made statements ranging from proposing additional amendments to completely changing the constitution. During last week's meeting of the Council on Judicial Reform, Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev also supported the idea of changing certain articles in the constitution, "if they are necessary to carry out full-fledged reform of the judicial sector."

This fall, two members of parliament have expressed their desire to launch constitutional amendments. The first initiative group led by MP Felix Kulov, leader of the Ar-Namys party, proposed removing the suffix "stan" and adding an "el" in the country's name through a nationwide referendum. According to him, the resulting "Kyrgyz El Republic" would make use of the Turkic-origin "el," that means "nation" in Kyrgyz. Kulov's proposal received varying judgments, ranging from the party leader's desire to attract public attention ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections to his attempt of drawing support from the so-called "national-patriotic groups."

According to Atyr Abdrahmatova, leader of the civic union For Reforms and Results, Kulov's proposal has little to do with changing the name of the country. Instead, Abdrahmatova claims that the suggestion was simply a pretext for probing how the Kyrgyz public would react to the idea of amending the constitution through yet another referendum. If the public agrees to such a proposal, the country's political forces could then add additional questions to the agenda of the referendum, such as for example a different power redistribution between the President, Government and Parliament. This would indeed bring Kyrgyzstan back to the times of the first two ousted Presidents, when the country's constitution was changed numerous times in favor of one office, turning it into a constant subject of political bargaining between the stakeholders.

Kyrgyzstan's current constitution, adopted in June 2010, contains a special clause banning any constitutional changes until 2020. This provision was introduced in order to ensure some measure of stability to the country's semi-parliamentarian form of government that the new constitution introduced. But last month, MP Karganbek Samakov, who has recently left the Ata Meken faction, issued a draft law repealing the ban. In his words, the "constitution is a living and

moving body and it needs to be changed when necessary. Especially now, some of its rules are often violated, are not always enforced and are contradictory in their content.” These initiatives of parliamentarians and the President’s readiness to discuss constitutional amendments are obviously not coincidental and prepare the ground for the next possible modification of the country’s constitution.

Local experts skeptically perceive the president’s apparent willingness to change the constitution as a means for conducting judiciary reform and instead suspect that he maneuvers to remain in office beyond his current term. According to political scientist Uran Botobekov, the President might be preparing to run for reelection in 2017, which is not possible under the current constitution. However, in his address to the Council on Judicial Reform last week, President Atambayev clearly stated that he has no intention to change the country’s constitution in his favor as his predecessors did and will not become an authoritarian leader. Time will show if words will be kept.

Indeed, it is questionable whether adding a presidium to the Supreme Court by launching a nationwide referendum will result in any effective reforms of the judicial branch, which remains dependent on the will of political actors. The recent release of former politicians accused of heavy corruption deals speak in favor of this judgment. The country’s political elite commonly blames the constitution for their inability or lack of political will to conduct meaningful reforms. This

constitution adopted only four years ago is unlikely to pose an exception. After more than two decades of independence, Kyrgyzstan is still engaged in a debate over choosing the most suitable system of governance.

The author writes in his personal capacity. The views expressed are his own and do not represent the views of the organization for which he works.