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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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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.

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ARMENIA CHOOSES CUSTOMS UNION OVER EU ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT

Armen Grigoryan

After nearly four years of negotiating the Association Agreement with the EU, Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan made an abrupt turn, announcing his intention to instead join the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. It is not possible to combine the two frameworks because of contradicting tariff regulations. Sargsyan's statement was made after increased political and economic pressure from Russia in recent months. Armenia's participation in Russia-led integration projects will imply very limited possibilities for cooperation with the EU. It will also result in Armenia's deeper isolation and cause additional complications for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process.

BACKGROUND: After meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on September 3, Armenia's President Sargsyan announced his country's intention to join the Russia-led Customs Union. Sargsyan stated that such a decision serves Armenia's interests, primarily from a security point of view. After Sargsyan's statement, European officials declared that the EU-Armenia Association Agreement, the initialing of which had been planned for November, was now "off the table." Although the EU-Armenia negotiations on the Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) have been ongoing for over three years and were finalized just six weeks before Sargsyan's visit to Moscow, the different regulations and tariffs applied by the EU and the Customs Union make it impossible to conclude agreements with both free trade zones at the same time.

In recent months, Russian pressure on Armenia included a rise in gas prices and a shipment of heavy weapons worth nearly US\$ 1 billion to

Azerbaijan. Russian officials, including former Ambassador to Armenia Vyacheslav Kovalenko, made numerous threatening or contemptuous statements. A few days before Sargsyan's visit to Moscow, the first secretary of the Russian Embassy in Armenia Alexander Vasilyev demanded that the agreements reached during the EU-Armenia negotiations should be disclosed, and threatened a "hot autumn" in Armenia.

A large part of Armenia's population views Sargsyan's stance as a preparation to surrender state sovereignty. Since membership in the Customs Union must be followed by joining the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, the general perception is that Armenia will no longer make foreign policy decisions on its own. The prevalent opinion is that Sargsyan's yielding to Russian demands came as a result of threats to provoke a war with Azerbaijan.

Opposition to Putin's and Sargsyan's plans may grow in the next few months and the coming anniversary of Armenia's Independence Day on



September 21 could be a critical point for mobilizing protests. Activists perceive a need to act fast, expecting that the situation may soon deteriorate and that the authorities may increasingly adopt Russian-style oppression, including bans on demonstrations, Internet censorship under the pretext of protecting children from dangerous information, mock trials, and so forth.

IMPLICATIONS: After Sargsyan's statement, the leaders of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine reaffirmed their determination to continue integration with the EU, which in turn is now considering the possibility of assigning more financial assistance for those three countries. Russia's ongoing "trade war" on Ukraine has not convinced the Ukrainian government to consider joining the Customs Union but has to the contrary consolidated the support for association with the EU. Russia is currently most interested in getting Ukraine – one of the largest European countries with significant natural resources and industrial capabilities – into its projects. Moldova's government also remains determined despite growing Russian pressure; during a recent visit to Chisinau Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin threatened to cut gas supply to Moldova during winter, and Russia

recently imposed an import ban on Moldovan wine.

Russia's possible further actions in the South Caucasus should be examined carefully, and it should also be considered that the Russian economy is in recession. A decision to cut budgetary expenses by 5 percent has just been made, while internal dissatisfaction with Putin's regime is growing. Furthermore, Russia faces a significant decline in revenues in the mid and long term as the U.S. will start exporting liquefied natural gas while reducing oil imports, and several European countries are exploring shale gas.

Desperation caused by the inability to persuade Ukraine to participate in the Eurasian project together with a need to boost oil prices may induce Putin to use Russia's influence in Armenia and the region's unresolved conflicts for gaining an even stronger domination in the South Caucasus. Russia may increase its military presence in Armenia, and perhaps also deploy some troops in Nagorno-Karabakh under the disguise of peacekeepers as tensions mount on the line of contact. Russia may also target Georgia, aiming at Finlandization of the country at gunpoint but also not excluding the possibility of full-scale aggression. Controlling Georgia would be crucial as it would allow Russia to control the pipelines supplying Azerbaijani oil and gas to Europe. Ultimately, Russia might seek to increase its oil revenues while restoring domination of the entire Caucasus region.

A stronger Russian domination, including manipulation of the unsolved

conflicts, would not only undermine regional security and prevent the region's democratization; it could also easily result in a drastic increase of energy prices with immediate negative consequences for the U.S. and EU.

So far, European decision makers have reacted to Sargsyan's intention to join the Customs Union by stating that none of the planned agreements with Armenia will be signed, and the implementation of a Twinning project providing support for legal and institutional reforms has been suspended. This means that the option of offering more economic assistance and some security guarantees to help resisting Russian blackmail is not being considered. It is also quite obvious that the National Assembly of Armenia will rubber stamp any law and ratify any treaty signed by Sargsyan, so Customs Union membership will be formally approved unless a strong protest movement comes to the fore.

In the U.S. and EU, there is seemingly a tendency to consider Sargsyan a victim of Putin's pressure. In addition, U.S. and European politicians have invested a high degree of trust in Sargsyan's administration and seem careful not to offer overt criticism that may undermine the Armenian regime.

CONCLUSIONS: Recent statements by European politicians exclude the possibility to initial the Association Agreement with Armenia in November, as there is a general understanding that further engagement of Sargsyan's administration in the EU association process is useless. It is now up to Armenia's civil society to try preventing the signing and ratification

of the Customs Union agreement. Otherwise, the ongoing economic decline and infringements of civil liberties will continue to stimulate emigration and depriving the country of human capital.

So far, Sargsyan's statement about the intention to join the Customs Union has induced European decision-makers to indicate that agreements with Georgia and Moldova, after being initialed in November, may be signed and enter the ratification phase earlier than previously planned. As further policy options are considered, it is reasonable to assume that Russian pressure in the region, particularly against Georgia, may intensify within a few months, coming to a peak soon after the Sochi Olympics.

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KAZAKHSTAN STEPPE EAGLE EXERCISE HELPS SUSTAIN NATO TIES

Richard Weitz

The latest Steppe Eagle annual multilateral military exercise in Kazakhstan occurred from August 10-23, at the Illisky Training Center near Almaty. The exercise, held under NATO auspices, confirms that the Kazakhstani national security community wants to retain defense ties with Western countries despite their country's deep military relations with Russia. This goal should grow in coming years as NATO winds down its combat operations in Afghanistan. In this context, sustaining Kazakhstan's Airmobile Forces Brigade (KAZBRIG) is important for promoting interoperability between NATO and the rest of Kazakhstan's military.

BACKGROUND: Like the other newly independent states that emerged from the wrecked Soviet military-industrial complex, Kazakhstan had to construct novel military institutions based initially on the few suitable defense resources the country managed to inherit from the former Soviet armed forces. In developing their armed forces, the Kazakhstani authorities pursued an eclectic approach. Since independence, they have readily sought subsidized military training, donated weapons, and other defense assistance from Russia, China, NATO and other foreign sources. More recently, the Kazakhstani armed forces have become more closely integrated with the Russian military, but Kazakhstan strives to maintain defense ties with Western and other countries as well.

Kazakhstan struggled to sustain adequate defense spending during the first years after independence. The authorities had to grant Russian forces access to test ranges on Kazakhstani territory in exchange for Russia's providing the underequipped

Kazakhstani armed forces with former Soviet weapons. But since the late 1990s, the Kazakhstani government has used some of its surging energy revenue to modernize and expand its conventional armed forces. The country's military reformers, backed by NATO experts, have been focusing on qualitative rather than quantitative improvements. They have been focusing on developing a more professional, flexible, and effective force with better quality equipment and training. NATO-backed programs have focused on strengthening Kazakhstan's capabilities for peacekeeping, Caspian Sea maritime defenses, and interoperability with the alliance. For example, NATO has been promoting Western-language training of Kazakhstani officers and helping to develop a professional noncommissioned officer class based on Western NCO standards.

The revival of Kazakhstan's economy since the late 1990s, combined with the post-9/11 influx of foreign militaries into Central Asia and the Caspian region, has enabled the government to



pursue its objective of developing a dual-purpose military, one capable of both self-defense and promoting international peace and security. The country's growing military capabilities, combined with the government's fundamental foreign policy principle that Kazakhstan requires a secure environment to develop politically and economically, has induced Kazakhstan to pursue capabilities that can be used outside the country's national borders in support of broader regional security objectives, including peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction missions. Kazakhstani leaders see multilateral military cooperation as making an important contribution to securing regional stability as well as their own country's security. Although Kazakhstan does not currently face a conventional military threat from another nation state, the country is challenged by transnational security threats such as narcotics trafficking, ethnic unrest and terrorism.

Kazakhstan's armed forces have developed extensive ties with Russia and the two defense establishments share doctrine, weapons, and training. Almost all of Kazakhstan's military units have greater interoperability with Russian forces than with NATO. Astana's only military alliance is the

Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), through which Russia provides its members extended security guarantees against external threats. After Russia, Kazakhstan provides the most military personnel to the CSTO's elite collective units. As a CSTO member, Kazakhstan is eligible to purchase some Russian military equipment at wholesale prices. Russia and Kazakhstan have joint air defense and other partnered units and missions.

IMPLICATIONS: In accordance with its multi-vector foreign policy, Kazakhstan has sought to develop military ties with Western countries. From 2003 to 2008, Kazakhstan deployed its elite Airmobile Forces Battalion (KAZBAT) to Iraq to assist in finding and neutralizing unexploded ordinance, constructing fresh water facilities, and providing medical treatment for the local population.

In December 2006, the battalion was formally expanded to brigade size and renamed the KAZBRIG, though the first KAZBAT still remains the core unit since the other two battalions have taken time to build into capable formations. The KAZBRIG has received substantial training, equipment, and other assistance from NATO and its member governments to increase its effectiveness and interoperability with the alliance. The brigade's one fully operational battalion is widely considered the Kazakhstani unit most likely to be capable of participating in Western-led multinational operations, which has yet to occur. KAZBRIG regularly participates in the annual Steppe Eagle exercise series designed to prepare the

Kazakhstani armed forces to join international peacekeeping exercises led by NATO or the United Nations.

The first Steppe Eagle exercise occurred in 2003 as a trilateral drill involving troops only from Kazakhstan, the UK, and the U.S. The number of participating countries has since doubled to include several more European and Central Asian states, though the number of Kazakhs considerably exceeds those of other countries. Steppe Eagle has been a NATO Partnership for Peace (Pfp) exercise since 2006. On January 31 of that year, Kazakhstan signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) with NATO.

Steppe Eagle 2013 occurred at the KAZBRIG's main training area in Almaty province. The participants included soldiers from Italy, Lithuania, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, as well as Kazakhstan, the UK, and the U.S. In addition to KAZBRIG, units from Kazakhstan's Army and Air Force also participated. In total, 1,680 multinational military personnel were involved in the exercise. By contrast, the previous Steppe Eagle, which occurred from September 6-18, 2012, involved fewer personnel from fewer countries. Observers from Belarus, Germany, Spain, and Ukraine also were present at Steppe Eagle 2013. Colonel General Zhasuzakov, Kazakhstan's First Deputy Minister and Chief of the General Staff, opened this year's exercise.

This year's Steppe Eagle 2013 was especially important because a team of experts from NATO's SHAPE Military Partnership Directorate is

evaluating the KAZBRIG's ability to achieve NATO Evaluation Level 1 on interoperability according to the alliance's Operational Capabilities Concept Program, which allows non-NATO militaries to practice alliance procedures and standards and enhance their interoperability with NATO through training and evaluation. Certification that the KAZBRIG is interoperable with NATO's standards would allow elements of the unit to operate with NATO forces on international Peace Keeping and Peace Support Operations (PKO/PSO). If the KAZBRIG achieves Level 1 interoperability, the alliance will work with Kazakhstan to raise the unit's capabilities to NATO Evaluation Level 2, which would allow the unit to join the NATO Pool of Forces.

The KAZBRIG's growing capabilities result from years of hard effort. The preparatory efforts included the establishment of the Pfp training center of the Military Institute of Land Forces (KATZSENT) to train Kazakhstani military personnel to NATO standards and procedures. In 2008, KATZSENT was designated the 19th Partnership Training and Education Centre with NATO. Since then, several dozen courses and workshops have been held there, covering such topics as NATO military staff procedures and English military terminology. To improve their English language skills, senior Kazakhstani officers participate in an English Language Training Program at the Royal College of Defence Studies and Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in the UK. More junior military

personnel learn English at York St John University in Britain and in classes organized by the British Military and Advisory Training Team (BMATT) at Vyskov in the Czech Republic. Other KAZBRIG personnel attend different courses at BMATT, which is the UK Ministry of Defence's Training Establishment for Peace Support Operations for the militaries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and North Africa.

NATO certification would also confirm the KAZBRIG's ability to operate in a multinational peacekeeping environment under a UN mandate. In line with the country's current defense doctrine, the Kazakhstani government has announced its intention to provide approximately 200 personnel from the KAZBRIG to one or more UN peacekeeping missions. It would still be difficult to send the entire unit since Kazakhstan's constitution prohibits the deployment of conscript soldiers on foreign missions; only long-term professional soldiers can be sent. And KAZBRIG, like other Kazakhstani military units, still contains some conscripts.

CONCLUSIONS: Sustaining KAZBRIG is important for promoting interoperability between NATO and the rest of Kazakhstan's military, which have less compatible equipment, training, and command and control arrangements. Most of the Kazakhstani armed forces also rely heavily on traditional Soviet military doctrine, which prioritizes defeating an adversary's conventional forces. Such a posture is not optimal for the type of foreign terrorist threats that currently

present a more plausible danger to Kazakhstan.

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MOSCOW SIGNALS INTENTION TO ESTABLISH GREATER CONTROL OVER CHECHNYA

Valeriy Dzutsev

An increasing number of conflicts between Chechnya's strongman Ramzan Kadyrov and Moscow may signify that the Russian government is gearing up to change the status quo in Chechnya. Regional authorities and Kadyrov himself have long been exempt from Russian law, which Russian leaders have motivated as a necessity for keeping Chechnya stable. Kadyrov's success in keeping Moscow at bay has to a large extent depended on his personal relationship with President Putin. Growing resentment among ethnic Russians against North Caucasians and Putin's weakening position make a tougher position on Moscow's part against Chechnya's pro-Moscow government more likely, a development that may have numerous unintended consequences.

BACKGROUND: On August 29, the Russian Prosecutor General's office surprisingly confronted abuses by the Chechen law enforcement agencies, issuing a special penalty ruling for their colleagues in Chechnya. Sergei Vasilkov, the deputy head of the Prosecutor General's office in the North Caucasus Federal District, explained to the public that Chechen investigators failed to launch investigations into 60 cases of disappearances and kidnappings that took place in the republic during the period 1990-2000. Vasilkov cited the kidnapping of the Russian President's Plenipotentiary Representative Valentin Vlasov, who was kidnapped in 1998 and released within several months after the payment of a ransom. Three reporters of Russian news agencies, 20 police officers, one prosecutor-general, two FSB officers, seven foreign citizens and over 50 other Russian citizens were also on the list of kidnapping cases that were not

investigated by the Chechen side, according to the Russian prosecution. The Russian official said that overall, nearly 3,000 people in the North Caucasus are listed as missing, over half of which went missing during the war in Chechnya. On August 31, the Chechen side retaliated by sending a letter to the president of Russia and the leader of Chechnya, asking them to find people who had been kidnapped by the Russian forces and to punish the perpetrators. The letter was signed by 300 relatives of those kidnapped.

Russian officials extremely rarely go public about present or past adverse developments in Chechnya. The Russian government arguably committed more crimes in Chechnya than did Kadyrov, however notorious he may be. Hence, prosecutor Vasilkov was selective about which cases to highlight and exclusively focused on those taking place during Chechnya's period of quasi-independence in 1996-



1999, when Aslan Maskhadov ruled the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria.

Kadyrov and his entourage are still vulnerable to the accusations since many, including Kadyrov himself, participated in Chechnya's struggle against Russian forces during the first Chechen war in 1994-1996 and afterwards. Having defected to the Russian side at the start of the second Russian-Chechen war in 1999, Kadyrov along with his father, Ahmad Kadyrov used brutal tactics to suppress resistance in Chechnya. Russia attained relative peace and stability in Chechnya by delegating much power to Kadyrov's family, having implemented a policy of so-called Chechenization. However, the central government also lost much control over the republic.

IMPLICATIONS: Many Russian commentators lamented the fact that Chechnya under Kadyrov became more independent than was the case under its previous separatist leaders, while at the same time securing generous funding from Moscow.

According to Alexander Kalyapin, head of the Russian Committee Against Torture, even such seemingly omnipotent Russian agencies as the FSB could not properly carry out investigations on Chechen territory as

the Chechen government simply ignored them. "Kadyrov's 'guardsmen' are absolutely immune to Russian laws," Kalyapin told Bigcaucasus.com in an interview in March 2013.

In March-April 2013, Russian liberal paper *Novaya Gazeta* unveiled a story about Kadyrov's men engaging in kidnappings, torture and extortions in Moscow. Yet, soon after those accused were detained, they were promptly released and Russian security officers involved in the investigation reportedly staged a walkout in Moscow. Since then, negative news about Kadyrov and Chechnya has prevailed in the Russian media and pressure on Kadyrov's government has mounted. In late May, Kadyrov promised to remove all his portraits from the streets in Chechnya during a confrontational press conference with Russian journalists and made good on his promise.

Many observers believe that the precarious peace in Chechnya is founded on personal agreements between Putin and Kadyrov. While the latter received enormous powers within Chechnya, he also provided a semblance of stability and loyalty to Russia that had been unknown to Chechnya for many years. Changing this balance would seem unwise on Moscow's part. However, there are at least two interlinked factors that undermine Chechnya's special status within Russia: the rising resentment among ethnic Russians toward North Caucasians and the gradual decline of Putin's popularity. Changes in Russia's policy toward Chechnya are also consistent with the general trend of establishing greater direct rule by

Russian authorities in the North Caucasus.

Russian nationalism is on the rise and slogans such as “Stop Feeding the [North] Caucasus!” have become common in the country. Ethnic Russians feel that too much of the country’s resources are consumed by the predominantly non-Russian North Caucasus. At the same time, ethnic Russians have become less tolerant toward the non-Russian culture of the North Caucasians and frustrated with the situation in the region. A poll conducted by the Levada Center, a respected polling organization, in July 2013 revealed that 75 percent of Russians thought that the situation in the North Caucasus was “critical,” “explosive” and “tense.” This percentage has remained almost exactly the same every year since 2007.

As ethnic Russians become increasingly critical of Moscow’s policies toward the North Caucasus, Russian politicians, including Putin, must react to the changing attitudes. The popular opposition figure Alexei Navalny made good use of the Russian government’s mistakes in the North Caucasus, pressing the Kremlin to adopt a harder line in order to keep up with public opinion. The election campaign for the position of Moscow’s mayor, which culminated in the victory of the incumbent Kremlin candidate Sergei Sobyenin on September 8, also led to a sweeping crackdown on illegal migrants in the city. Due to the long held Russian tradition of restricting the movement of its own citizens, illegal migrants in the Russian capital included not only foreigners but also

Russian citizens, most prominently North Caucasians.

What appears to be a “race to the bottom” is taking place in Russia, as both Putin’s regime and leading opposition figures, such as Alexei Navalny, strive to outperform each other in harshness on the North Caucasus. Chechnya is naturally the first target because Kadyrov evidently enjoys the greatest degree of autonomy from Moscow among all regional leaders and has the closest relationship with Vladimir Putin. The stakes in Chechnya are quite high, because unsettling the situation in the republic for the third time since the breakup of the USSR will take place in very different circumstances. During the first two wars with Russia, Chechnya was an island of instability in the North Caucasus. In contrast, most parts of the North Caucasus are now unstable and Chechnya is not currently the most violent republic. If the situation in Chechnya would spiral out of control, the area of instability in the North Caucasus would expand more than ever before in recent history.

CONCLUSIONS: As the Russian government indicates that it wants to establish greater control over Chechnya, tensions in the republic and the wider North Caucasus region risk intensifying. Russian nationalism appears to be the main driver behind the changes as both the Kremlin and popular opposition figures are headed in the same direction of establishing greater direct rule over Chechnya and in the North Caucasus in general. Breaking the status quo in Chechnya would likely result in a ripple effect

throughout the already volatile North Caucasus. These processes appear to be closely linked with the trajectory of Putin's regime. As the regime is becoming weaker, the pressure on Kadyrov's government is likely to increase. Changes in Chechnya and in the North Caucasus in general appear to be imminent.

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YEVKUROV REELECTED PRESIDENT OF INGUSHETIA

Tomáš Šmíd

On September 8, the president of Ingushetia was for the first time in history elected by the Ingushetian parliament. The People's Assembly elected the highest representative of this North Caucasian republic, and could choose from three candidates, all of whom were nominated by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. The candidates were Urushan Yevloyev, Magomed Tatriev and the incumbent President of Ingushetia, Yunus-bek Yevkurov. As many observers predicted, Yevkurov won the elections having received 25 out of 27 votes. The remaining two deputies voted for Yevloyev. Yevkurov was inaugurated soon after his election.

BACKGROUND: In the past, it has been up to the Ingush voters to elect their presidents, of which Ruslan Aushev (1993-2001) and Murat Zyazikov (2002-2008) were legitimized this way. In later years, only those appointed by the President of Russia were allowed to run, which applied to Zyazikov as well as Yevkurov. However, in April 2008 the Kremlin ruled that Ingushetia's president should again be elected among several nominated candidates. Consequently, the People's Assembly concluded that the head of Ingushetia shall be elected by the Parliament. The main argument against allowing direct presidential elections through a popular vote is that the high level of tension in the North Caucasus makes campaigning too risky. Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev stated that the culture of the Ingushetian people makes them distinctive in a way that prevents them from holding a regular presidential election. Yevkurov, the candidate favored by Kremlin, had the same opinion, possibly due to concerns over the potential results of a popular vote.

As many observers predicted, Yevkurov won the elections by receiving 25 out of 27 votes. He was subsequently inaugurated and made a mandatory oath of affirmation. Along with tremendously multiethnic Dagestan, virtually mono-ethnic Ingushetia remains the only republic of the Russian Federation to have a president elected by parliament.

IMPLICATIONS: Yevkurov has never been in a secure position since the very beginning of his political career, and the Kremlin has been highly mistrustful of him. When he started his first term in office, violent rebel actions inside Ingushetia's territory rose significantly, and Yevkurov survived one assassination attempt. Additionally, Yevkurov has been forced to face Ramzan Kadyrov, the ambitious leader of the neighboring Chechen Republic. Yevkurov has long been aware of the fact that the Kremlin favored Kadyrov.

However, things have changed as the Kremlin has stated that Yevkurov is the Kremlin's favorite and will be the sovereign ruler of Ingushetia, at least



for this year. Although Kadyrov is viewed as Putin's principal ally in the region, Putin indirectly supported Yevkurov on several occasions. Some observers believe that the Kremlin aims to change its overall strategy in the region. Since Yevkurov prefers soft power over violence to tackle Islamism and rebellions, making him the new North Caucasian leader might ensure a long-term benefit for the Kremlin. Kadyrov's ruthless approach to the insurgency no longer seems effective and the Kremlin's support for him risks becoming counterproductive.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin's potential decision to support Yevkurov over Kadyrov remains hypothetical. Earlier this year, observers anticipated that the Kremlin might get rid of Yevkurov with the help of Kadyrov. In the end however, the Kremlin decided to keep the North Caucasian representatives in their places. Observers believe that the Kremlin will back Yevkurov, at least until the Winter Olympics are launched in Sochi. Nevertheless, the Kremlin's support for Yevkurov is restricted to the inner territory of Ingushetia. On the one hand, Putin backed Yevkurov as a presidential candidate. On the other hand, taking the whole North Caucasus region into account, the link between Kadyrov and

the Kremlin is much stronger. By supporting Yevkurov, Putin has most likely signaled to Kadyrov that he should stay away from the internal affairs of Ingushetia, at least until the end of the Olympics.

The prospect of Yevkurov assuming a leadership role in the North Caucasus region is almost inconceivable. Ingushetia is the smallest North Caucasian republic, while Chechnya constitutes the most populous nation of the region. In short, unlike Yevkurov, Kadyrov controls a pivotal territory in the region. In addition, despite Kadyrov's heavy handed and violent exercise of political power, he still enjoys a significant degree of popular support. The author's own experience during several visits to the North Caucasus supports this claim. Indeed, many Ingush would prefer a Kadyrov-like ruler to a soft leader. Most people believe that exercising hard power has proven to be more effective in the short term. Yevkurov's determination to instead use soft power has, however, gradually lowered the number of victims to violence in Ingushetia.

Even though Yevkurov's strategy might be successful in tackling the issue of armed Islamic violence, he has not managed to eradicate or even diminish the level of corruption and nepotism. The public, and in particular those who are not part of Yevkurov's clan, are aware of the fact that Yevkurov has accomplished little in this regard.

Although electing the president via the parliament was intended to prevent radicals from resorting to violence, Security Chief Ahmed Kotiev was killed on August 27. Besides being a

high ranking official, Kotiev was an essential component in Yevkurov's plan for tackling extremism and radicalism. Ingushetian "Boyeviks" (bandits in the Russian parlance) have claimed responsibility for the murder. Despite the fact that this was not the first attempt on Kotiev's life, the security chief refused to have bodyguards protecting him. Kotiev's predecessor Bashir Aushev, cousin of the former president Ruslan Aushev, was also killed in 2009. Unlike Aushev, who employed ruthless tactics against Boyeviks while also prosecuting innocent people, Kotiev promoted a policy of prevention and reintegration. Nevertheless, blood revenge might have been the motivation for Kotiev's murder and he had worked as security chief long enough to make some enemies. However, the fact that the assassination took place before the elections is unlikely to be a coincidence. Having been elected president, Yevkurov continues to pursue his main objectives of dealing with radical Islamists while simultaneously retaining the Kremlin's confidence and support. In addition to the struggle for influence in his own republic, Yevkurov also has to face Kadyrov in a clash over the means for conducting counterinsurgency in the North Caucasus.

CONCLUSIONS: Yevkurov won the elections, meeting the expectations of most observers. The Kremlin gave the deputies of the People's Assembly a clear sense of direction by backing Yevkurov before the elections took place. By voting for Yevkurov, the deputies fulfilled the only possible

scenario. Yevkurov can now count on the Kremlin's backing, at least in the short term. As far as Kadyrov's interventions into Ingushetia's internal affairs are concerned, it is likely that Yevkurov will have the Kremlin's support in this regard as well. Nevertheless, things might change drastically once the Winter Olympics in Sochi are over. Ingushetia, like other North Caucasian republics, has to bear this in mind. Yevkurov will have to stay alert to the risk that North Caucasian Islamists led by Doku Umarov could act to disrupt the Winter Olympics. If Umarov strikes, the Kremlin might retaliate in a brutal manner. From Adygea to Dagestan, all North Caucasian politicians and observers worry that such events will take place. The assassination of Kotiev is a reminder that even the highest ranking officials are vulnerable to insurgent attacks.

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AZERBAIJAN GEARS UP FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Mina Muradova

On October 9, ten candidates for president will struggle for the votes of almost five million Azerbaijani voters. Observers have expressed doubts over the transparency and fairness of the upcoming elections and increasing pressure on journalists has induced youth and political activists to organize protest actions against the government in recent months.

The president of Azerbaijan is directly elected for a five-year term by absolute majority. Constitutional amendments in 2009 removed the limitation for a president to serve no more than two consecutive terms. Thus, the incumbent president can run for a third term in the upcoming elections.

Ten candidates are nominated for elections, eight of which are largely loyal to the authorities and not considered serious challengers to incumbent President Aliyev. On September 13, the Central Election Commission (CEC) barred opposition candidate Ilgar Mammadov, a leader of the Republican Alternative (REAL) opposition movement, from running against President Aliyev, who is nominated by the ruling New Azerbaijan Party for a third term. Mammadov was registered as a candidate on August 27, though he has been in detention since his arrest in February on charges of inciting a riot.

“This is a pure political decision and not a decision made by the Central Election Commission,” REAL’s

executive secretary Natig Jafarli wrote on his Facebook page and recognized there was little hope that Mammadov’s candidacy would be registered, “...because Azerbaijani authorities are in favor of decreasing interest in the elections and do everything to calm down any political activity related to the elections. If Mammadov was registered, he would be released and give extensive public statements, which would lead to increased interest in the elections by creating a political intrigue within the campaign. The authorities, taking all these aspects into account, preferred not to register his candidacy,” Jafarli noted. On September 16, Jafarli informed via his Facebook page that the board of REAL called on its followers to give their votes to a second opposition candidate, Jamil Hasanli.

Election officials have allowed Hasanli, 61, a historian and former opposition MP who currently teaches Modern History at Baku State University, to run in the October presidential elections. Hasanli is nominated by the National Council of Democratic Forces, established by around 20 opposition parties and groups, and represents the joint opposition as a single candidate. He replaced Rustam Ibrahimbeyov, a famous screenwriter whose works include the Oscar-winning Russian film *Burnt by the Sun*. The CEC blocked his candidacy, referring to his double citizenship in Azerbaijan and Russia. Ibrahimbeyov

requested the cancellation of his Russian citizenship and later accused the Kremlin of deliberately delaying the process as a favor to President Aliyev.

In an address to fellow opposition members in late August, Hasanli stated that, "Today, I believe that the criminal government of Azerbaijan is not only facing the opposition forces, but the whole nation ... the authorities finally must feel the strength of the people. The government finally must respect our nation's voice and return the most fundamental constitutional right back to the people – that the people are the source of the power."

Incumbent President Aliyev, who came to power in 2003 after the death of his father Heydar, is widely expected to be re-elected in the October 9 polls. Observers from various international and local organizations noted a lack of debates and a low level of pre-election activity. A pre-electoral delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) issued a statement on September 13 statement, saying that the forthcoming election will be held in "an apparently competitive" environment. "At the same time, the lack of credible challengers to the incumbent President has led to the absence of a substantive nationwide debate. Distinctions between the political platforms of would-be opposition candidates are rather vague, the struggle boiling down to a clash of personalities." A full 32-member delegation from PACE will arrive in Azerbaijan on October 7 to observe the voting.

PACE stressed that its many recommendations, concerning freedom

of expression, assembly and association, and the functioning of pluralist democracy, have not been implemented. In addition, the Venice Commission recommendation related to the composition of electoral commissions at all levels has not been properly addressed. "The President's decision not to conduct a campaign of his own on the grounds that he is well-known by his deeds is disappointing. Furthermore, his frequent presence in the media, while totally legitimate given his functions as the incumbent, puts other competitors at a disadvantage," according to the PACE statement.

The Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center (EMDS), a local nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization promoting elections, issued an interim report saying that signatures in favor of Aliyev were collected behind the closed doors of schools, hospitals, and other state-funded entities. "We registered a massive collection of personal IDs from employees of schools and their further submission to local governor's administrations in some districts. We believe that signatures were collected not only in favor of Ilham Aliyev, but also for some pseudo-opposition candidates," said Anar Mammadli, head of EMDS, and noted that the center also registered that people were induced to give their signatures "in exchange for solutions to their problems by local officials or municipalities."

Human Rights Watch said in its September report that the Azerbaijani authorities are engaged in a "deliberate"

and “abusive” strategy to limit dissent before the elections. “The strategy is designed to curtail opposition political activity, limit public criticism of the government, and exercise greater control over nongovernmental organizations. The clampdown on freedom of expression, assembly, and association has accelerated in the months preceding the October presidential elections,” the report noted.

The group also reported a “dramatic” deterioration in the government’s record on freedom of expression, assembly, and association in the last 18 months.

WILL GEORGIA FOLLOW ARMENIA’S PATH TOWARDS EURASIAN UNION?

Archil Zhorzholiani

On September 4, Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili stated that Georgia could join the Russia-sponsored Eurasian Union if this would benefit the country’s interests.

“I am looking at it with attention and we are studying it. At this stage we have no position at all. If in perspective we see that it is interesting for the strategy of our country, then why not; but at this stage we have no position,” Bidzina Ivanishvili said.

The statement drew much attention especially in light of Armenia’s decision, announced a day earlier, to join the Customs Union with Russia, which will come at the expense of an Association Agreement with the EU. The Georgian PM later explained that his remarks did not imply a revision of Georgia’s foreign policy, of which integration with the EU and NATO remains a cornerstone. To buttress his words, Ivanishvili announced on

September 8 that the government aimed to accelerate the signing of an Association Agreement with the EU, including provisions on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), in spring 2014.

Government officials have sought to diminish the implications of Ivanishvili’s remarks, insisting that Ivanishvili only suggested that developments surrounding the Eurasian Union should be observed, not that Georgia should join it. Some Georgian analysts have translated the PM’s remarks as a diplomatic effort intended to contribute to Georgian-Russian rapprochement. Advocates of such an approach assert that by not excluding participation in the Kremlin’s Eurasian initiative, Ivanishvili attempted to moderate Georgia’s official stance towards Moscow.

By contrast, the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party

sharply criticized Ivanishvili's remarks, arguing that they constituted a threat to Georgia's sovereignty and security. President Mikheil Saakashvili asserted that over the past ten years Georgia's pro-western foreign policy course had never been questioned by any major political force, whereas Ivanishvili's recent statement risked reversing this record. "The government explores a Eurasian Union membership perspective... but there is no need for studying and analyzing the possibility of returning back into the fold of the occupying power," he said.

Giga Bokeria, Secretary of the National Security Council, termed the Eurasian Union Putin's tool for halting the European integration of Russia's neighboring states and denounced the PM for failing to offer a clear position on the issue.

The UNM's presidential candidate David Bakradze claimed that the upcoming presidential elections would not be only about voting for a candidate, but the manifestation of a Georgian choice before the world and whether the country's struggle for freedom and European values will continue.

Bakradze said that Georgian Dream's candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili would incrementally bring the country under Russia's influence while the former speaker of parliament Nino Burjanadze would do it immediately, implying that the UNM remains the only political force truly following the European path.

Although the UNM has deftly used Ivanishvili's statement to boost its election campaign, its criticism has

been well-grounded. In fact, it is impossible to reconcile participation in the EU's free trade zone with membership of Russia's Custom and Eurasian Unions, as each provide different custom regimes.

What exactly Ivanishvili's government intends to explore is unclear since on July 22 the EU and Georgia successfully ended negotiations on a DCFTA, the efficiency of which was detailed in a [Trade Sustainability Impact Assessment](#) between the EU and Georgia, forecasting that the DCFTA has the potential to increase Georgia's exports to the EU by 12 percent and imports by 7.5 percent.

Moreover, Ivanishvili's statement came immediately after Yerevan's decision to reverse its European course, underlining its potential implications. Since Armenia does not share a physical border with Russia and its frontier with Azerbaijan is closed due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Georgia remains the only potential state to serve as a transit country. In this context, Ivanishvili's previous talk about reopening rail traffic between Russia and Armenia through Georgia and its breakaway region of Abkhazia, obtains increased significance (see the [02/03/2013 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)). Armenia's membership in the Customs Union risks strengthening the rationale for such projects to the detriment of the interests of Azerbaijan, which will seek to discourage Tbilisi from taking part. Thus, Moscow's pressure on both Baku and Tbilisi is likely to increase.

Since no other country engaged in the EU's Eastern Partnership is as strongly dependent economically and politically

on Russia as Armenia, it might be harder for the Kremlin to force Tbilisi to replicate Yerevan's move. However, Moscow possesses many other instruments to exercise influence on Georgia.

The Orthodox Church, which has tremendous clout in Georgian society, does not welcome the process of European integration and condemns the

EU's support for the rights of sexual and religious minorities (see the [05/30/2013 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)). Thus, apart from ethnic tensions, Moscow could seek to stimulate provocations along these lines, which would discredit Georgia in Brussels and undermine the prospects of signing an Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia.

TAJIK OPPOSITION PARTIES NOMINATE FEMALE CANDIDATE PRESIDENT

Alexander Sodiqov

On September 9, the Alliance of Reformist Forces of Tajikistan (ARFT) announced that its members will support a unified candidate during the presidential elections set for November 6, 2013. The Alliance includes the country's two leading opposition parties, the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) and Social-Democratic Party (SDPT), as well as a number of non-governmental organizations and prominent individuals. During the upcoming elections, these diverse political forces will rally behind Oynihol Bobonazarova, a 65-year old woman lawyer and human rights activist, not currently associated with any political party.

The announcement followed uneasy negotiations between the members of the ARFT over a candidate who would be acceptable to their very different constituencies. The IRPT is the largest opposition group in the country and perhaps the one closest resembling a genuine political party with strong

social and ideological roots as well as a complex organizational structure. The group served as a leading force in the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) which fought against the government of incumbent President Emomali Rahmon during the 1992-1997 civil war. The IRPT's main support bases are the traditionally more religious communities in the eastern Rasht Valley (Gharm) and the southwestern region of Qurghonteppa (Kurgan-Tube), although it has supporters throughout the country. The SDPT, in contrast, draws its support from among a much narrower group of urban-based intelligentsia united around the party's leader, prominent lawyer and activist Rahmatillo Zoyirov.

The IRPT is by far the strongest political force in the Alliance, and the party's leader, Muhiddin Kabiri, faced strong pressure from members and supporters to run for president. By agreeing to throw his support behind a female presidential candidate, who is

neither a member of the IRPT nor known as a very pious person, Kabiri risked alienating many of his constituencies. In order to prevent this from happening and to legitimate Bobonazarova in the eyes of the party's conservative and patriarchal membership, Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, a prominent Islamic leader who had served as part of the IRPT's senior leadership in the past, was made Bobonazarova's proxy (*doverennoyelitso*).

Kabiri has also stressed that the party's late founder and leader, Said Abdullo Nuri, had a high regard for Bobonazarova and even nominated her as Deputy Prosecutor General as part of a government quota awarded to the UTO after the civil war. She refused the nomination in 1997. On September 17, the IRPT's congress endorsed Bobonazarova as a presidential candidate. Barzu Abdurazzokov, a prominent Tajik theater and film director, also accepted an offer to become Bobonazarova's proxy during the congress.

The SDPT, whose leadership had worked closely with Bobonazarova in the past, will find it much less difficult to identify with her personality and political views. Zoyirov has urged the country's civil society, social media activists, and members of the Tajik opposition in exile to support Bobonazarova.

In order to formally enter the presidential contest, Bobonazarova still needs to gather 210,000 signatures from her supporters before October 7. Although the country's veteran leader President Rahmon has not yet

announced whether he would seek re-election, few people in the country doubt that he will join the contest. Rahmon will almost certainly run for the office which he has held since 1993. The Democratic Party (DPT) and Agrarian Party (APT) have also nominated their candidates, while the Communist Party (CPT) and Socialist Party (SPT) have announced their intention to run for the presidency.

Rahmon will almost certainly win the upcoming elections and thus ensure another seven years in office for himself (the current constitution does not allow him to hold the office beyond 2020). During the contest, Bobonazarova is expected to be the second most popular candidate. However, she is not likely to pose any serious challenge to Rahmon. The country's first ever female presidential candidate is virtually unknown to voters outside of major urban centers. During the seven weeks remaining before the elections, she is unlikely to win many votes without access to state-controlled television or to other advantages afforded to the incumbent president, such as the full control of the election administration, legions of loyal, state-employed voters, religious authorities, army conscripts, and the ability to blend official duties and campaign activity.

Besides, even if Bobonazarova had many voters to support her on election day, there would be no guarantee that these votes would count. Tajikistan has never held an election judged free of fair by western observers, and it is very difficult to gauge to what extent the

election results reported by the authorities reflect the voters' will.

A lawyer by education, Bobonazarova was among the founders of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) in the late 1980s. After the DPT joined the IRPT in fighting against the "constitutional" government (headed by Rahmon after November 1992), Bobonazarova was arrested in 1993 and charged with treason and a coup attempt. She was later pardoned by Rahmon and, from 1996-2004, she served as an adviser with the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office in Tajikistan. From 1996 to 2007, Bobonazarova headed Tajikistan's branch of the Soros Foundation (now called Open Society Foundations), a philanthropic organization supporting democracy and human rights. After 2007, she led a Western-funded human rights NGO involved in monitoring prisons, fighting against torture, and defending the rights of women and labor migrants.

BISHKEK HOSTS THE 2013 SCO SUMMIT

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On September 13, 2013, a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) took place in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyzstan. The leaders of Russia, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Iran and Mongolia, as well as delegations from India and Pakistan, both of which have observer status in the SCO, attended the summit and outlined their positions on a number of geopolitical issues. The joint positions of the participants were reflected in the so-called "Bishkek Declaration."

The security situation in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the NATO troops by the end of 2014 was one of the major topics of international concern discussed at the 13th SCO Summit in Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev, whose country has been chairing the SCO for the last year, expressed his deep concern over the situation in Afghanistan after 2014.

The Kyrgyz President stated that the activities of terrorist and extremist groups are still on the rise in Afghanistan and called on the SCO member states to continuously support Kabul in its effort and determination to revive the country. Atambayev stated that Bishkek will host an international conference on the situation in Afghanistan on October 10, 2013. The conference will be attended by prominent experts and will serve as yet another opportunity to jointly search for solutions, exchange ideas and concerns.

This year's Summit in Bishkek was also highlighted by the participation of the newly elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, his first foreign trip since taking office on August 4, 2013. The Iranian President used the SCO Summit to hold a number of bilateral talks with other foreign leaders, among them Russian President Vladimir

Putin, who stated that Iran, just like any other member of the international community, has a right to develop and use nuclear power for peaceful purposes. In his turn, President Rouhani supported Moscow's position on the situation in Syria, saying that any external military involvement should be possible only with the consent of the UN Security Council and only after the exhaustion of all diplomatic tools. The Chinese, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik leaders also expressed their support for Russia's position and jointly welcomed the decision of Damascus to join a global ban on chemical weapons. Kyrgyz Political Scientist Sheradil Baktygulov believes that the formulation of these joint positions on the matters of international and regional issues is an important step forward for turning SCO into a regionally united platform and force.

The participation of the Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Bishkek summit was also under close scrutiny from the international community. It must be recalled that prior to the start of the Summit, the Chinese leader paid official visits to almost all the Central Asian capitals and managed to conclude energy deals worth billions of dollars. During his visit to Ashgabat, the sides reached an agreement over the potential tripling of gas imports to China by 2020. Furthermore, Beijing signed deals with Tashkent worth US\$ 15 billion and expressed its readiness to invest another 3 billion into strategically important neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Foreign policy experts believe that

these agreements demonstrate that the Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union are no longer locked in Moscow's embrace when it comes to economic investments. At the Bishkek SCO summit, China reiterated its support for Moscow's position on the situation in Syria and additionally suggested to launch a special SCO account to provide financial support for members in urgent need.

The Bishkek Summit concluded with the adoption of the respective declaration, which stresses the need to take joint actions in the fight against terrorism, extremism, separatism, illegal drug trafficking and other transnational threats. The Bishkek Declaration also included a joint position of the member states on the situation in Syria, namely respect for the country's sovereignty and the need to put Syrian chemical weapons under international control. The declaration also focused on the further modernization of national economies, the establishment of an even closer investment partnership, cooperation in the field of innovative technologies and the agricultural sector, development of transport and communications, and the need to carry out further works on launching a special SCO Development Bank.

In accordance with the Charter of the institution, the chairmanship for the coming period was handed over to Tajikistan, which will host next year's summit in its capital Dushanbe.