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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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RUSSIA RAMPS UP PRESSURE ON TAJIKISTAN

Dmitry Shlapentokh

Tajikistan, one of the most impoverished states of Central Asia, has a tense relationship with neighboring Uzbekistan and faces a potential threat from Islamist radicals from Afghanistan, a threat that will most likely increase after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon has been on an endless search for geopolitical partnerships. While China, the U.S. and Iran are all seen as potential partners, Russia remains Tajikistan's principal patron. Yet, Dushanbe's own demands for bilateral security arrangements have antagonized Moscow, which is increasingly threatening to deport Tajik migrant workers as a means for influencing Dushanbe's policies.

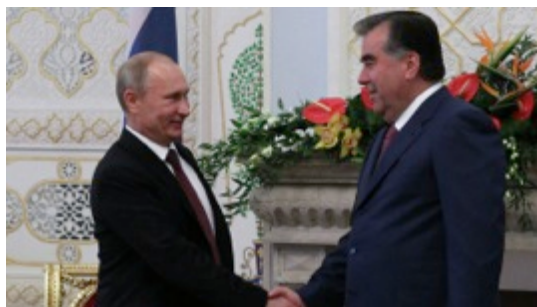
BACKGROUND: In October 2012, Moscow and Dushanbe seemed to have resolved most problems on their bilateral agenda. Dushanbe agreed to keep a Russian military base in the country free of charge in exchange for Russia's implicit protection of Rakhmon's regime and considerable economic and military aid. Yet, soon after accepting Moscow's demands, Rakhmon stated that he does not see any true benefits for Tajikistan from integrating with regional military organizations sponsored by Russia and demanded a dramatic increase in Russian investments in Tajikistan's hydroelectric project, along with other demands.

By March 2013, tensions rose rapidly between Dushanbe and Moscow. On March 15, the Chief of the Russian General Staff and Tajikistan's Minister of Defense discussed the October agreement between Putin and Rakhmon, but the negotiations apparently led nowhere, causing Igor Shuvalov, First Deputy Premier of Russia, to cancel his visit to Tajikistan.

The political observer Leonid Savin noted that if Rakhmon would create problems for Moscow, he could well be replaced by a "more reasonable" person, which could be justified to the West as "promoting democracy."

Moscow has not only engaged in talks but also in actions aimed at destabilizing Rakhmon's regime, most prominently by threatening to deport Tajik migrant workers, which would imply serious economic and political problems for Tajikistan. This threat was first discussed in March 2013 when a Russian observer noted that Tajikistan, more than any other country in Central Asia, should stay on good terms with Russia since "around one million Tajiks, one eighth of the county's entire population, is in Russia."

The threat became more pronounced in April 2013, when nationalist Duma member Vladimir Zhirinovskiy stated that if Russia would deport Tajik labor migrants, Tajikistan would be in the hands of Islamists. Moscow also sent



the signal that it was seriously contemplating deportations.

The Russian public was prepared for a possible action against Tajik migrants as Russian authorities provided a variety of justifications for its approach, claiming that Tajikistan is a hotbed for terrorists who then move to Russia. The information was widely accepted by the Russian public, among which anti-migrant opinions, especially against Caucasians and Central Asians, are quite popular. A series of demonstrations took place in Russian cities on April 14, echoing the call for stricter migration controls for labor migrants.

IMPLICATIONS: Moscow also sought to employ carrots in its relations with Tajikistan. During a May 2013 meeting between Rakhmon and Putin, the latter hinted that trade between Russia and Tajikistan could be increased. Yet, the meeting brought no visible results despite Putin's call on Rakhmon to speed up the ratification of the October 2012 treaty, which stipulated the conditions for Russia's military presence in Tajikistan. The Kremlin's displeasure was conveyed by articles published in the Russian press, implying that Rakhmon's regime is extremely unstable and could easily be overturned. The potential problem of Tajik migrants being deported from Russia would be devastating for

Dushanbe and Moscow seems ready to take a step in this direction.

Dushanbe has responded by seeking to upgrade its relations with China, Iran and the West, foreign policy moves that clearly irritated Putin, who invited Rakhmon to visit Moscow on August 1, 2013. The negotiations were inconclusive and Russia's response to Rakhmon's visit was rather skeptical. Centrist *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* noted that Rakhmon came to Moscow empty-handed and should understand that a "multi-vector" foreign policy is for "clever and strong" leaders and he definitely does not fall into this category. The Kremlin implicitly warned that Tajikistan's attempt to engage with NATO and the U.S. on the one hand, and China and Iran on the other, could lead to not only a foreign policy debacle but to the collapse of the regime, which Moscow would facilitate by deporting Tajik migrant workers.

Russian observers noted that Dushanbe is wrong to assume that Tajik migrants are of any importance to Russia. Pro-government *Regnum* also noted that former Soviet countries who encourage their citizens to go to Russia should remember that Russia is under no obligation to accept them and that the right to be in Russia is a privilege. Moreover, the number of migrants that Russia is ready to accept will decline and only countries who are members of the Eurasian Union, or are at least on good terms with Russia, will enjoy privileges of sending their migrants to Russia. Another Russian observer noted ominously that "Rakhmon is aware that if Russia

would lose patience and would send back several planes with deported Tajik migrants, it would lead to chaos in Dushanbe.”

In early August 2013, soon after Putin’s meeting with Rakhmon, the Russian authorities seemingly decided to tackle the problem in earnest. There is a plan to build 83 camps for illegal migrants in Russia, where they can be detained awaiting deportation. One such camp is already built in Moscow. While the camps and arrests of thousands of immigrants are not designated only to target Tajiks, the authorities clearly regard the new policy as a means for pressuring Tajikistan and making credible the assertion that limiting Tajik migration to Russia, or even expelling a considerable number of Tajiks, is indeed on the table. By extension, this demonstration has implications also for other countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus – some observers believe that Moscow could start to deport Azerbaijanis if Baku does not follow Moscow’s bidding.

CONCLUSIONS: Limitations to Tajik labor migration to Russia would be a serious problem for Rakhmon’s regime, and could indeed trigger social upheaval resembling the recent unrest in Kyrgyzstan. The results of such unrest would be manifold and unpredictable. While Moscow’s

designs could indeed prove successful and the Kremlin would be able to install a less problematic counterpart in Dushanbe, there is also a risk of the Kremlin’s assertions about Islamism in Tajikistan becoming a self-fulfilled prophecy. Such a development would have profound implications not only for Tajikistan but also Uzbekistan, and would by extension create a serious problem for Moscow itself. This possibility is understood by Kremlin officials, who also likely grasp the extremely negative impact that mass deportations of migrant workers, regardless of ethnicity, would have for Russia’s image across Central Asia, and that this would damage the prospects for establishing the Eurasian Union. Finally, mass deportations would hurt the Russian economy.

The variety of problems which mass deportations could create not just for Dushanbe but also for Russia itself will likely prevent the Kremlin from full implementation of its threat. Still, the prospect of selectively limiting migration and deportations in a smaller scale is clearly becoming a tool of Russian foreign policy toward former Soviet states and possibly beyond.

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KAZAKHSTAN PLANS TO REWRITE ITS INNOVATION STRATEGY BY HOSTING EXPO-2017: WILL IT WORK?

Rafis Abazov and Arystanbek Mukhamediuly

Kazakhstan plans to host World EXPO under the theme “Energy of the Future” in 2017 as part of its ambitious Innovation Strategy, designed to develop skill-intensive sectors and to promote innovative businesses, especially in the alternative energy sector. In preparation for the event, the Kazakh government plans to spend between US\$ 3 and 5 billion on alternative energy development and infrastructure, respectively. Opinions in the country are deeply divided. Some believe that this is an excellent opportunity to promote targeted industries and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the alternative energy sector. Others are very skeptical, considering it likely to become another white elephant with little impact on Kazakhstan’s national economy.

BACKGROUND: The government considers World EXPO-2017 as an opportunity to catch a very promising economic tide, as many economists around the world predict a significant potential for job and business creation and economic growth in a new approach to economic development – the creation of a green economy. Kazakhstan – like many countries in the CIS – is working hard to reinvent itself in the post-global financial crisis era. This includes the search for country recognition in the international market, development of internationally and regionally competitive industries and steering clear of high dependency on energy exports and the so-called Dutch Disease.

In this context, the government is investing great hope and a very substantial amount of money (some local experts estimate that the total bill will be about US\$ 10-12 billion, in contrast with government estimates of

US\$ 3-5 billion) on World EXPO – an international exhibition to be hosted in Kazakhstan’s new capital Astana in summer 2017.

In fact, World EXPO-2017 has become an integral part of what President Nursultan Nazarbayev calls “energy-ecological security” and a “green bridge” to growth. Astana won the right to host World EXPO-2017 beating another strong contender, Belgium, by a large margin of 148 votes against 44 on November 22, 2012. Kazakhstan selected a very appealing topic for the event – alternative energy – and committed to spend between US\$ 300 and 400 million on EXPO site facilities, US\$ 1-1.3 billion on a city railway system, roads and new construction, and about US\$ 3 billion on promoting its own alternative energy sector. In addition, the country hopes to attract the latest hi-tech in the field of



alternative energy and, according to Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the UN Byrganym Aitimova "to share it with the least developed and developing countries." It also established an ambitious target of attracting between four and five million visitors to this event alone.

For comparison, according to the State Statistics Agency, Kazakhstan attracted less than five million visitors during all of 2012, of whom only about 13 percent were tourists, and ranked 88th out of 140 in the World Tourism Ranking for 2013 (behind Latvia in 48th place, Russia in 63rd and Ukraine in 76th place).

Achieving these ambitious goals is quite a challenge for a nation of just 16 million without access to large maritime communication routes and which just a decade ago was one of the largest international donor aid recipients in the former Soviet space. The country made considerable achievements in its economic development during the energy boom era that started around 2001-2002 and that has driven the price of oil to double or as much as triple compared with energy prices in the 1990s, and GDP per capita grew from US\$ 5,900 in 2001 to an estimated US\$ 13,900 in 2012.

IMPLICATIONS: The Kazakh economy is indeed in need of innovative public policy initiatives and effective policy actions in order to address the country's economic challenges and stimulate economic diversification and competitiveness. The highly concentrated investment efforts announced in the World EXPO-2017 preparation initiatives could become steps in the right direction if implemented effectively.

The government already spent almost US\$ 10 billion on the country's new capital Astana and a network of multi-billion dollar techno- and industrial parks, and US\$ 3 billion on a highway project that includes an East-West cross-national highway section of the World Bank-supported Western Europe - Western China highway (WE-WC). Human capacity building projects include Kazakhstan's multi-billion flagship Bolashak (Future) educational program, which has funded several thousand Kazakhstani students to study at major prestigious universities in the West and in East Asia. In addition, the government plans to spend billions of dollars on domestic education projects, such as Nazarbayev University and massive funding of several national research universities. It also spent several billion dollars to back up its banking sector during the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, when Kazakhstan's economy plunged from double digit growth of its national GDP in 2001 to 1.2 percent in 2009.

The multi-billion dollar EXPO-2017 initiative is already channeling significant investments into large

national projects with a certain impact on the country's economic development and GDP growth.

First is a concentrated direction of resources targeting some sectors of the economy with high potential in the regional markets and stimulating the development of the innovative SME sector. In a time of weakening demand for Kazakhstan's traditional exports, the government is trying to stimulate domestic consumption, domestic markets and those economic sectors that experienced losses during the crisis or have lost their international competitiveness.

Second, Astana has also increased investments into the development of national infrastructure including highways, railways and communication lines. Many highways and local roads outside the strategically important Almaty-Astana highway form a veritable Tetris of holes and patches. International development experts suggest that a good national infrastructure is an attracting point for international investors as well as for visitors and tourists.

Third, Kazakhstan has begun investing resources into alternative energy production including opening its first US\$ 130 million solar panel manufacturing operation in Temirtau and a US\$ 100 million innovative wind-powered electricity station in Zhambyl. These sources of energy are still quite expensive and heavily subsidized from the state budget, yet such moves make sense in a country with strong solar radiation and regular wind patterns, and where

building and maintaining traditional power-transmitting lines to remote areas is extremely costly and complicated.

The fourth impact is job creation, education reform and research in the field of alternative energy. New projects are already hiring university graduates with appropriate skills, paying significant salary premiums and bonuses for those who have the requisite knowledge and experience.

CONCLUSIONS: Heated policy debates still continue on the merits of hosting the World EXPO in Kazakhstan in 2017, though the discussion is gradually shifting toward the implementation process. The experience of Kazakhstan and many neighboring countries underline the importance of a high-quality implementation policy to successful completion of national programs and projects. In this context, Kazakhstan's government should work carefully to identify high-priority infrastructure projects, economic sectors and enterprises that might pioneer new technologies and new approaches, and avoid "white elephant" super-large construction projects which would be abandoned upon the conclusion of World EXPO. Second, the government should use a public-private partnership (PPP) approach to stimulate a high level of investments in the private sector, especially SMEs, both in the development of new energy-saving technologies and in preparation for World EXPO. Last but not least the government should avoid the trap experienced by many developing countries where much

money is spent on infrastructure and buildings, but inadequate amounts on building human capital through education and training. Kazakhstan should continue investing in human capacity building among the general population and especially among its young people, and should make regular needs assessments to identify skills and competencies that will be invaluable in the new and innovation-driven economy in the context of Kazakhstan's national development.

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KAZAKHSTAN'S COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGIES FOR THE POST-2013 SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Jacob Zenn

Since the first terrorist attacks struck Kazakhstan in 2011, the country has reformed its counter-terrorism strategy to confront emerging threats. Kazakhstan learned that more intelligence and understanding of extremists could have prevented the attacks. The country also saw that counter-radicalization programs are necessary to counter Salafism, which is anathema to the country's religious traditions and can serve as a gateway to jihadism. In the near future, Kazakhstan will also focus on regional counter-terrorism cooperation to limit the fallout of wars abroad on the home front.

BACKGROUND: Between May and August 2011, Kazakhstan's westernmost provinces witnessed a series of attacks that served as wake-up call to the government. In May, there were suicide and vehicle bombings in Aktobe near National Security Committee buildings involving Kazakh and Kyrgyz citizens. In June and July, there were shootings of police and armed forces officers in Shubarshi, Aktobe. In early September, there was another suicide bombing in Atyrau.

From October to December 2011, Jund al-Khilafah (JaK), with connections to militants in the North Caucasus and Afghanistan, claimed three attacks in Atyrau, Taraz and Boraldai village in Almaty. Like the series of attacks in western Kazakhstan, JaK's attacks involved police shootings and suicide bombings. However, a key difference was that JaK used jihadist forums to claim the attacks and issue propaganda to condemn Kazakhstan's

secular institutions, religious policies, and the Zhanaozen labor protests of December 2011. The use of these forums, which are administered by al-Qaeda representatives, showed that JaK was an international terrorist group. Later in 2012, evidence emerged that JaK's amir in Afghanistan was an al-Qaeda member and a Swiss citizen of North African descent, who trained Muhammed Merah to carry out a shooting spree in Toulouse, France in March 2012, in which four French paratroopers and three Jews were killed.

In 2012, the activities of Salafist-Jihadist groups like JaK were curtailed, but Kazakhstan saw a new extremist trend. There was an uptick in activities of Salafist groups like Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), which harbors the goal to Islamize majority-Muslim countries



and create a global Islamic Caliphate. TJ's *mashura* (Arabic for "council") exists parallel to Kazakhstan's Spiritual Directorate of Muslims; therefore by implication it rejects the country's political and religious authorities. TJ has also been connected to al-Qaeda in countries ranging from Mali to Pakistan. However, it focuses on religiously moderate groups like Kazakhs and Kyrgyz because TJ believes they are most in "need" of a "revival of Islamic piety." In 2012, Kazakhstan reported that it suppressed an all-time high of more than 200 TJ missionaries.

In 2013, there have been fewer reports of Salafist-Jihadist and TJ activity, but an increase in reports of Kazakh jihadists abroad. Kazakh citizens, possibly including ethnic Chechens, are believed to be the largest contingent of Central Asians in the North Caucasus. There are also an estimated 200 Kazakhs in Afghanistan and Pakistan and an unknown number in Syria, some in leadership positions. For example, on July 15, 2013, a Kazakh named "Brother Abu-Mu'adh al-Muhajir" appeared in a video with Syrian rebels introducing the "mujahedeen from Kazakhstan" and calling on "those who live in tyranny" to "emigrate from Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan, or any other country" and engage in jihad. The prospect of the return of jihadists from abroad to Kazakhstan after the U.S. withdrawal in Afghanistan or a potential rebel victory in Syria may be the next trend Kazakhstan faces.

IMPLICATIONS: Rather than being caught behind the curve as in 2011, Kazakhstan is now working to prevent new threats before they surface, in particular threats to the home front from "hot-spots" around the world. In May 2013, Kairat Lama Sharif, Kazakhstan's Head of the State Agency for Religions, acknowledged that the country was "concerned" about JaK and other terrorist organizations that were recruiting Kazakh youths to "so-called holy wars," such as in Syria, the North Caucasus and Afghanistan. Similarly, Kazakhstan's Deputy Chairman of the National Security Commission, Kabdulkarim Abdikazimov, acknowledged that "the most serious threat is posed by terrorist organizations located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area that are planning to build a 'khalifat' in Central Asia." To anticipate worst-case scenarios, Kazakhstan has looked at the history of terrorist attacks in its near abroad for examples of what could be expected. The Kazakh Special Forces have therefore trained for hostage negotiations in a "Beslan-style" attack, referring to the town in North Ossetia, Russia, where in 2004 more than 380 people, mostly students, were killed at an elementary school during a terrorist takeover of the entire school.

Consistent with viewing terrorism as regional issue, Kazakhstan has reached out, in particular, to Afghanistan not only by increasing investment, but also by providing educational grants to Afghans to study in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan hopes that when the Afghan students return home and take leadership positions, they will influence the country to adopt a more liberal approach to religion and society, thus mitigating the potential Talibanization of the country post-2013. At the same time, Kazakhstan is working to secure its own borders, including — on the directive of President Nazarbayev — developing the Near-Border Services, improving customs authorities, and more closely monitoring freight delivery to prevent weapons or drugs from being trafficked. In addition, in July 2013, Kazakhstan's intelligence services uncovered local Salafist groups funding terrorist groups abroad. Farther afield, Kazakhstan has also begun cooperating with the European Union on a joint counter-terrorist propaganda program.

Yet, in light of the homegrown cells that carried out attacks in 2011 and the increased activities of groups like TJ, Kazakhstan has been forced to look inwards to address radicalization. According to Kazakhstan's National Security Commission, there are over 20 radical Salafi Jamaats ("Societies") with approximately 500 members in the country. In western Kazakhstan, which is closest to the North Caucasus and where JaK's founders came from, there are several thousand Salafists, the majority of whom are under 30

years old. Some Salafists, including JaK's founders, were radicalized through viewing jihadist propaganda online, especially the Russian jihadist Said Buryatskiy, who was killed in the North Caucasus in 2012.

Kazakhstan has therefore blocked more than 950 websites that promote terrorism after receiving court permission in 2011-2012. At the same time, Kazakhstan launched an anti-terrorism website, Counter-terror.kz, which posts materials to discourage terrorism. On the legal front, in 2013, Kazakhstan amended the Criminal Code and the Law on Combating Terrorism to combat the use of information systems or educational materials to radicalize others. In total, Kazakhstan has invested more than US\$ 1 billion on countering religious extremism.

CONCLUSIONS: Recognizing the importance of a stable internal environment for continued economic growth and political liberalization, Kazakhstan has taken the terrorist threat seriously. As President Nazarbayev said in December 2012, "the secular nature of Kazakhstan is a crucial precondition for the nation's further development." The attacks Kazakhstan suffered in 2011 and the activities of grassroots Salafist groups and international ones like TJ have compelled the country to respond to the reality that even though Kazakhs are religiously moderate, their country is not immune to extremist influences from beyond Kazakhstan's borders.

Since 2011, Kazakhstan has minimized the previous year's threat: the homegrown Salafist-Jihadist threat in

2011 did not repeat itself in 2012. Moreover, TJ has been less effective in recruiting in 2013 than in 2012, especially after Kazakhstan proscribed it as a violent extremist organization. In 2013, however, Kazakhstan is not acting retroactively, but preparing its security framework for the future. The security threats Kazakhstan will face will be tied to regional developments. Thus, the country is seeking to prevent citizens from being influenced by extremists abroad, especially in Syria, the North Caucasus and Afghanistan, while also developing international partnerships to prevent extremists abroad, including Kazakhs already in foreign theatres, from gaining influence in Kazakhstan.

As long as Kazakhstan's neighbors in Central Asia, including Xinjiang in

China and the Ural region in Russia, remain stable, Kazakhstan will likely be able to withstand the increasingly complex – and dangerous – operational environment across Eurasia that will likely emerge after the U.S. war in Afghanistan and the end of the Syrian civil war.

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TAJIKISTAN'S PRIVATE SECTOR LOSES ITS LEADER AND COORDINATING COUNCIL

Oleg Salimov

The upcoming presidential elections in Tajikistan this fall will be a determinant of political developments in the country in coming years. There is little doubt that the current president Emomali Rakhmon will seize the opportunity to stay in power for a fourth presidential term secured by a 2003 referendum. While there has been no formal statement on whether Rakhmon will run again, his political opponents have recently experienced increased pressure, implying that Rakhmon is preparing the ground for a head start. The arrest of Zaid Saidov, a businessman and leader of the newly founded political party New Tajikistan, demonstrates the precautions taken by the Tajik government ahead of the presidential elections.

BACKGROUND: Saidov, a former government official and head of Coordination Council of Business and Public Associations (CCBPA), was arrested on multiple charges in May ahead of November's presidential elections. Shortly before his arrest, a special session of CCBPA members declared the council disbanded.

Rakhmon, known for his uncompromising tactics in dealing with the political opposition, has eliminated not only direct rivals but also former allies considered potential threats to his status. Over time, Rakhmon's tactics towards his critics and challengers have toughened progressively. According to an Amnesty International report of July 3, 2013, Tajikistan's government has arrested domestic opponents on various charges and sentenced them to lengthy imprisonment terms, while expatriate critics have been tracked down and forcefully returned to Tajikistan.

Saidov was arrested in May 2013, a month after he announced the founding of the political party New Tajikistan. During the announcement, Saidov indicated that his party would not affiliate itself with either pro-government or opposition formations and would pursue compromise solutions for resolving economic and social issues through close cooperation with the general public and government. Saidov particularly stressed that he did not intend to run in the upcoming presidential elections, a claim that nevertheless failed to protect Saidov from arrest.

Following Saidov's arrest, a special session of the CCBPA enacted the decision to dismantle the Council, stating that the organization had outlived its purpose and was used by Saidov as a platform for his personal political ambitions. Saidov headed the council for less than a year before his arrest and only a month after he announced his political party. The



council, which gathered around 50 business associations, was formed in 2007 with the purpose of protecting the interests of its members, assisting in developing the private sector, and creating an attractive environment for investments.

IMPLICATIONS: The coincidence of such factors as the upcoming presidential election, Saidov's proclaimed political independence and maturity, and Rakhmon's intolerance to opposition on the one hand, and the range of Saidov's charges from polygyny to corruption and the rapid dismantling of CCBPA on the other, suggest that Saidov's arrest is politically motivated.

Initially, Dushanbe city prosecutor's office accused Saidov of polygyny, which is illegal in Tajikistan. Shortly thereafter, Tajikistan's state anti-corruption agency incriminated Saidov of fraud based on a 2009 state audit of the construction tender fulfilled by Saidov's company. These accusations were later amplified by charges of corruption, extortion, abuse of office, and rape and coercion to abortion of an underage person. According to Tajik officials, Saidov committed most of these crimes in 2002-2006 while he served as the Minister of Industry, while the rape allegedly took place in

2008. They explain the discrepancy in time between the committed crimes and the accusations by the late reaction of Saidov's victims. The government's inactivity regarding Saidov's alleged construction tender fraud revealed in 2009 remains an open question. Another controversy in Saidov's case is the fact that, contrary to the law, his detention and arrest on May 19 preceded the revocation on May 20 of his immunity as a legislator of the city of Dushanbe legislative assembly.

The former chairman of CCBPA Nekrui Zabiroy initiated the dismantling of the Council on May 13, motivating the measure by the Council's incompetency and violation of the principle of political neutrality. The official explanations also included leadership failure and Saidov's abuse of power by using CCBPA for his personal political ambitions. However, CCBPA members argue that these arguments are inconsistent: first, Saidov's alleged failures motivate the election of a new chairman and a revision of the CCBPA's charter, but not a complete liquidation of the Council that has existed for six years. Second, the accusation of Saidov's exploitation of the Council for personal political ambitions is irrelevant to statements of the CCBPA's incompetency and political sway. Third, the dismissal of Saidov and liquidation of the CCBPA were not substantiated by evidence and sensible explanations. Observers have reported that the decision was made based on the demands of Zabiroy and a few other Council members. The fact that a

special CCBPA session was called two days after Saidov was publicly accused of polygyny and fraud suggests a premeditated and controlled scenario. The developments involving Saidov and the CCBPA have two major implications. First, it is unlikely that Rakhmon's ruthless elimination of a median political opponent will provoke a revolutionary mood among Tajikistan's public. On the one hand, Saidov's arrest constitutes a test of the public atmosphere preceding the elections. Hence, Rakhmon seeks to determine whether he has reached the peak of public compliancy or whether there is a need to adjust his pressure mechanisms. On the other hand, he leaves little room for dissent by restraining even nominal hints of opposition. Frequently described by critics as a talented conciliator but a poor manager, Rakhmon has neutralized a rival capable of accumulating support among those disillusioned with current policies. The two years until Tajikistan's next parliamentary elections in 2015 could have provided the business-minded Saidov and his New Tajikistan party with sufficient time to establish themselves as a viable alternative to the currently inert political parties. By arresting Saidov, Rakhmon has ensured that he remains in total control of Tajikistan's political process. Second, the liquidation of CCBPA could have a negative impact on the country's economy. The Council was seen as a vital institution for Tajikistan's fragile private sector. It was developing a culture of lobbying and protecting the interests of

businesses in Tajikistan, while also performing regulative and informative tasks for business associations. It was a body, autonomous from the government, which coordinated the development of the country's business sphere. The instantaneous and abrupt decision to liquidate the Council disregarded years of laborious work aimed at expanding Tajikistan's private sector.

This decision can be seen as ill-considered for at least two reasons. The Council's founders were concerned over the difficulty in establishing trust in associations and the Council among its members. This trust will now be extremely difficult to restore. It also left the public sector scattered and dependent on the government.

The other reason is that the arrest of a high-profile entrepreneur and liquidation of the Council could intimidate foreign investors, who may interpret the developments as a threat to their business assets in Tajikistan and a limitation to the perspective of business development in the country. In 2005, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development assessed investment input in Tajikistan as the weakest among the former Soviet republics, in part due to extensive government involvement in the private sector. The Bank's most recent report from 2012 noticed a slim improvement of the business environment, which could reflect positively on the country's investment outlook. Yet, instead of the expected improvement, the Tajik government's growing interference with the private

sector, marked by Saidov's arrest and the closure of CCBPA, can return a negative investment input.

CONCLUSIONS: The grounds for Saidov's arrest and the following closure of CCBPA remain questionable. Both events can damage Tajikistan's political image and investment portfolio. Saidov's arrest demonstrates the arrival of a new phase of Tajikistan's development. Saidov sensed the necessity in shifting state policy away from managing the aftermath of the civil war towards establishing market-oriented institutions and acted accordingly. Yet,

Rakhmon has demonstrated that he will not shy from using his powers as president to extend his political longevity. Therefore, the breakdown or persecution of Saidov's New Tajikistan party can be expected in a near future.

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VLADIMIR PUTIN VISITS BAKU

Mina Muradova

In mid-August, Russia's President Vladimir Putin paid his first visit to Baku after resuming his presidency. No significant political declarations were made, but observers considered the visit to be a gesture aimed at dismissing speculations that the Kremlin is supporting an opposition candidate with Russian citizenship in Azerbaijan's presidential elections, scheduled for October. The visit was intended to demonstrate that bilateral relations between the two countries are developing, even in the face of recent setbacks.

On August 13, President Putin arrived in Baku with a large delegation including the foreign minister, defense minister, minister of transport, energy minister and the presidents of energy companies Rosneft and Lukoil. The last time Putin visited Azerbaijan was in 2006.

At the end of his visit, Putin termed Azerbaijan "one of Russia's long-standing, traditional and reliable partners," with whom he had discussed details of "strategic partnership." He underlined "an obvious record" of trade between the two countries in trade, which grew between 37 and 47 percent last year.

After official bilateral negotiations, Putin and Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev witnessed the signing of a number of intergovernmental documents. Russia's Rosneft oil company and the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)

signed an agreement on cooperation and the general terms and conditions for oil deliveries. A document on cooperation between the emergency ministries of the two countries for 2013-2015 was also signed, as were intergovernmental agreements on cooperation in air search and rescue, on the construction of a road bridge over the Samur River across the Russian-Azerbaijani state border, and a Program for Humanitarian Cooperation through 2015.

Relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have been tense for some time after the termination of two major intergovernmental agreements; a 1996 deal to transport oil from Azerbaijan through the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline and another agreement regarding Russia's lease of the early warning radar station Darial in the Gabala region of Azerbaijan. Apart from this, speculations that the Kremlin intended to use the finances of some oligarchs of Azerbaijani ethnicity to shift of power in Azerbaijan to a Moscow-supported leader poured oil on the flames, especially when the opposition announced Rustam Ibragimbekov, a 74-year-old Oscar-winning screenwriter with Russian citizenship, as their united single presidential candidate.

However, by making this visit Moscow intends to demonstrate that Azerbaijan is still within Russia's sphere of influence and to publicly

show support for the incumbent President Aliyev.

Azerbaijan will hold presidential elections on October 9, 2013, and Aliyev was recently registered as a candidate for the ruling party and stands a high chance of staying in power. Two weeks after Putin's visit, Azerbaijan's Central Election Commission (MSK) refused to register Ibragimbekov as a candidate for the Presidential elections. The commission said its decision on August 27 was based on the fact that Ibragimbekov has dual citizenship and is not a permanent resident of Azerbaijan. Although Ibragimbekov applied to cancel his Russian citizenship, this issue was delayed by Russian governmental agencies.

Ali Ahmadov, the Executive Secretary of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, dismissed claims that Putin arrived in Baku to demonstrate support for Aliyev ahead of the elections. "Ilham Aliyev doesn't need support from Vladimir Putin. The only force supporting President Aliyev is the Azerbaijani people, the voters," he stated.

There was some expectation that Putin would push Azerbaijan to integrate with its regional economic and political-military structures, such as the Eurasian Union, the Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), and the military Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), but no declarations on these topics were made.

However, military cooperation between the two countries is growing. "Today, military cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan is estimated at around US\$ 4 billion and it is a growing trend," said Aliyev at the news conference at the end of negotiations. Rasim Musabekov, an MP and a political analyst told journalists that "Azerbaijan has become one of the leading countries among buyers of Russian military equipment, which is considered, rightfully, as among the best worldwide ... This is not just military-technical cooperation. It's very important to discuss questions which can affect Azerbaijan. For example, the situation in the Caspian, where military activity is increasing, there is the context of Iran, developing events in the Middle East, plus the most important – settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict."

On the eve of Putin's visit, another MP, Zahid Oruj, stated to Trend news agency that Azerbaijan and its strategic ally Turkey were forming a unified army: "The creation of joint Azerbaijani-Turkish military units proves that the two countries share a unified view of regional problems and security issues. The old formula for our cooperation, 'One nation, two states' must be replaced by another slogan: 'One nation, one army'." He noted that the two countries "undertake joint strategic actions," which are supported by "political will and adequate resources."

A significant moment of Putin's visit was the arrival of two military ships from Russia's Caspian Flotilla, the

missile ship Dagestan and the small artillery ship Volgodonsk, and the fleet's commander Vice Admiral Sergey Alekminsky. According to BBC, Dagestan can fire missiles at a range of 300 kilometers, which is slightly less than the width of the Caspian Sea and which supersedes the capacity of all other Caspian states. "It is symbolic that our talks coincide with a friendly visit of a detachment of the Russian Caspian Flotilla to Baku. The Dagestan missile ship and the Volgodonsk small artillery ship are among the vessels. At the end of 2013 Azerbaijani sailors

plan to make a return visit to Astrakhan," Putin said, underlining that there are still many unresolved issues relating to the Caspian Sea, including security, border delimitation, and conserving biological diversity.

TRAFFIC ACCIDENT SPARKS TENSIONS BETWEEN KYRGYZSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On August 26, 2013, the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry sent a note of protest to official Tashkent regarding a traffic accident involving Uzbek high ranking diplomats that, according to the reports, led to a scuffle.

According to the information from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), a car with an Uzbek Embassy license plate CMD 111 collided with another vehicle after midnight on August 23, 2013, near a night club in Bishkek. The eyewitnesses recorded that all passengers of the diplomatic vehicle were intoxicated, stepped out of their car, and assaulted the driver of the other vehicle causing physical injuries. According to the press officer of the Kyrgyz MIA, Uzbekistan's Ambassador Komil Rashidov was also in the diplomatic car when the

accident occurred. The press officer also stated that the immediate medical check of the other driver revealed no alcohol consumption. The other persons involved in the accident did not go through this check due to their diplomatic status. It was also reported that Uzbekistan's Embassy in Bishkek refused to provide any comments regarding the incident.

This is not the first time that the Foreign Ministries of the two countries exchange protest notes. Only a few weeks prior to this incident, another diplomatic scandal erupted between the two neighbors, this time involving an official of the Kyrgyz Embassy in Uzbekistan, Kanatbek Sharshenbek. According to the news source Zamondosh, the Kyrgyz diplomat did not obey the traffic rules in Tashkent

and used nationalistic rhetoric, insulted and injured the team of medical workers who arrived at the scene. The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry immediately recalled its diplomat back to Bishkek and an investigation is underway.

In light of these developments, experts foresee further tensions between Bishkek and Tashkent. An independent member of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Ravshan Jeenbekov, believes that the diplomatic tensions will have a negative impact on the overall bilateral relations, which even before those incidents were quite frosty and antagonistic. Jeenbekov stressed the importance of using diplomatic tools to improve the relations, instead of exchanging protest notes.

The tensions between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have escalated sharply over the course of this year. On January 6, 2013, a major border incident occurred in Sokh, an Uzbek enclave on the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Residents of the village Hushar on the Uzbek side of the border attacked a newly constructed Kyrgyz border watchtower and illegally entered Kyrgyz territory. As a result of this incident, more than 30 Kyrgyz residents from a nearby village were captured and held hostage in the Sokh enclave. Following negotiations between officials of the two

governments, those taken into custody were freed. Yet, instead of cooperating to examine the causes of the incident and find possible solutions, both sides simply traded accusations.

As history shows, ethnic tensions between various communities are common in the region, as are border incidents around areas which have not yet been delimited. According to Josef Lang from the Center for Eastern Studies, the scale of the events in the Sokh enclave demonstrates that there is a clear tendency for such conflicts to escalate. This was the first time when an ethnic conflict overlapped with mutual animosity between the two countries. Previous ethnic conflicts have mainly concerned citizens of Kyrgyzstan of different ethnic backgrounds. The illegal crossing of another country's border and taking its citizens captive is alarming and reminiscent of the overall unstable situation in the region.

Experts are making unanimous calls to Uzbek and Kyrgyz authorities to intensify bilateral dialogue at all possible levels and show commitment and willingness to resolve border related issues, which have already cost a number of lives. Kyrgyz border officials recently shot dead two Uzbek counterparts on charges of illegal border crossing.

PRESIDENT NAZARBAYEV SETS NEW GOALS BEFORE PARLIAMENT

Georgiy Voloshi

On September 2, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev officially opened the new session of the country's Parliament after a traditional summer recess. At the beginning of his address, the head of state commended the work of the current legislature formed as a result of early parliamentary elections in January 2012. Apart from the ruling Nur Otan party, which dominated the lower chamber of Parliament for the five preceding years, two other political parties are since represented there, even if their relative weight remains insignificant. Nazarbayev's praise also comes as a confirmation of his lasting trust in the deputies, whereas a number of experts previously predicted new snap after the controversy caused by the pension reform law.

As Kazakhstan's economic performance in the first half of 2013 was marked by decreasing tax revenues, poor export statistics and disappointing GDP growth results, Nazarbayev has outlined a set of socioeconomic measures in response to the worsening domestic situation. In his address to the Parliament, the president urged the deputies to adopt a new law regarding entrepreneurial activities in the country, with a view to supporting small and medium businesses and ensuring their protection against administrative abuse. This proposal echoes earlier measures defended by Nazarbayev, namely the creation of regional entities entrusted with presenting the existing

business legislation to potential entrepreneurs.

Another proposal regarding the pursuit of Kazakhstan's social stability is related to the elaboration of a new law regulating the activities of trade unions. According to Nazarbayev, such legislation could upgrade the culture of labor relations by increasing the awareness of hired workers about their rights and ensuring better labor standards. The Ministry of Regional Development and Samruk-Kazyna's Center for Social Partnership, both established in September 2012, are already pursuing the goal of facilitating the resolution of labor disputes and guaranteeing the respect of workers' rights, together with the task of stimulating job creation. However, the role of trade unions has been mostly inconsequential on this front, and the proposed law would seek to increase their involvement in both national and local social issues.

President Nazarbayev's address to the parliamentarians also included now-frequent references to the green economy signaling the country's willingness to move away from fossil fuels to innovative technologies. This fall, the Parliament is thus expected to adopt a number of draft laws providing for the widest possible implementation of energy saving schemes and the rapid introduction of alternative sources of energy. The EXPO-2017 exhibition whose organization has become a matter of national pride for the Kazakhstani government is widely expected to

provide further proof of Kazakhstan's growing attention to environmental concerns and the rational use of energy resources.

This, however, does not mean that Kazakhstan would create impediments to the future development of hydrocarbon deposits which continue to represent the major source of revenues, despite the ongoing diversification of the national economy. Speaking before the Parliament, Nazarbayev once again promised to ease the delivery of subsoil use rights to both domestic and foreign investors. Already in late November 2012, he urged the regional governors to lift bans on the exploitation of new deposits in exchange for modern technologies and knowhow on the part of selected subsoil users. As Kazakhstan struggles to maintain the same high level of exports against the backdrop of pessimistic trends on the world's energy markets, the arrival of more investors could boost industrial production and lead to the creation of new jobs in the provinces.

Overall, the Kazakhstani President's outline of upcoming legislative proposals to be debated by the Parliament has largely concentrated on the need to ensure stable long-term economic growth and the preservation of social peace, especially in light of the December 2011 popular uprising in

western Kazakhstan's town of Zhanaozen. These very goals are defined as priorities by the Kazakhstan-2050 strategic program that Nazarbayev unveiled last December in lieu of a previous vast reform agenda of 1997. Unlike in the preceding years when the country's prosperity was still mostly founded on the rapid development of its energy sector, today's global economic outlook favors a different orientation of state policies. Thus, the current emphasis on innovative cooperation with Kazakhstan's foreign trade and economic partners implies a more active introduction of state-of-the-art technologies on Kazakhstani soil.

In this regard, Nazarbayev has insisted on the need to encourage foreign companies to support Kazakhstan's diversification agenda by sharing their best practices and investing in local businesses. However, it remains to be seen whether the country's leadership would be able to implement its ambitious plans in practice, given the considerable share of the extracting industry in Kazakhstan's economic well-being. The expected launch of oil and gas production at the Kashagan deposit on the Caspian Sea only complicates the otherwise arduous task of building an innovation-based economy.

AZERBAIJAN APPLIES FOR PACE RESOLUTION ON THE SARSANG RESERVOIR IN NAGORNO- KARABAKH

Bakhtiyar Aslanov

The Sarsang water reservoir is one of the highest reservoirs supplying Azerbaijan with water and is located in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, controlled by Armenia. It is located at an altitude of 726 meters above sea level with a dike of 125 meters and a capacity to hold 560 million cubic meters of water. The reservoir was built in 1976 on the Tartar River and extends across 14.2 square kilometers in the area of Aghdere. Sarsang is said to provide 40-60 percent of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic's electric energy and is operated by the Artsakh HEK OJSC electric company. It has the capacity to provide irrigation water for 100,000 hectares of agricultural land in six rayons in Azerbaijan, Tartar, Agdam, Barda, Goranboy, Yevlakh and Aghjabadi.

Azerbaijan claims that the Sarsang reservoir and its installations have not been technically served since war erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the early 1990s. This lack of maintenance, Azerbaijan claims, poses a serious risk to the reservoir and to the lives of 400,000 inhabitants in non-occupied peripheral provinces in Azerbaijan. A possible collapse of Sarsang could result mass casualties and a humanitarian catastrophe in the region. Consequently, the reservoir has recently become a topic for debate in Azerbaijan as well as Armenia.

Azerbaijani diplomats have raised this issue as an urgent question on the agendas of different international organizations, like the Council of Europe. In June, the Azerbaijani MP

from Shamakhi Elkhan Suleymanov, who is also a member of Azerbaijan's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and president of the Azerbaijani Association for Civil Society Development, noted at the Geopolitics of Azerbaijan and European Energy Security conference that the "Sarsang reservoir has currently become a serious source of threat. Obviously, any accident will result in both an ecological crisis and mass casualties of civilians and a humanitarian crisis".

Nagorno-Karabakh's Deputy Prime Minister Arthur Aghabekyan issued a response on August 14, 2013. According to *Armenian News*, he emphasized the de facto republic's readiness to begin dialogue and discussions with Azerbaijan on joint management of water resources in Nagorno-Karabakh and the additional seven surrounding Azerbaijani districts that are currently under Armenian military control. Underlining the importance of the Sarsang reservoir and water flowing from the Tartar River, Aghabekyan stressed that the "Sarsang reservoir has more capacity than it is currently used. Both the Armenian and Azerbaijani sides will gain from proper use of the water canals that were built during the Soviet era." He underlined that if Azerbaijan reacts positively to the proposed cooperation, the Armenian side will be responsible for financing large investments in the territories under its control in order to reconstruct the water resources. No

answer was delivered to this statement by Azerbaijani officials.

On August 28, Suleymanov put forward a proposal on the Sarsang water reservoir to the PACE leadership on 2 September 2013, signed by 45 MPs from 18 countries, for review at the PACE Bureau meeting in Dubrovka on the same day. He sent letters to PACE's Secretary General Wojciech Sawicki, PACE President Jean-Claude Mignon, and members of the PACE Bureau.

Suleymanov stated in the letter that especially in the summer when people and agriculture mostly need water, the Armenian side frequently stops the water. However, in winter, the water from Sarsang is opened, flooding agricultural and eroding roads, which has seriously damaged Azerbaijan's agriculture since the occupation. He stated that the purpose of his proposal was to raise awareness in Azerbaijani society as well as in the international community about the risk of humanitarian, ecological and biological crisis connected to the Sarsang reservoir, and obtain international

assistance to prevent the possible catastrophe in advance.

In a comment to *Armenian News* on Azerbaijani media reporting on the Sarsang issue, a spokesman for Nagorno-Karabakh's President Davit Babayan claimed that Nagorno-Karabakh's government expressed its intention to work jointly on the management of water resources, but that Azerbaijan instead applied to PACE about "Armenians whose actions will lead to a humanitarian disaster." He added that "instead of complaining to various agencies, the majority of which have no mandate to tackle such problems, Azerbaijan should better pick up enough courage to appeal to the Karabakh side."

Suleymanov's proposal for statement, called "On the possibility of humanitarian catastrophe of the Sarsang reservoir in the occupied territory of Azerbaijan" was approved by the PACE Presidential Committee at the PACE Bureau meeting in Dubrovka on 2 September 2013.