

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 17 NO. 12
24 JUNE 2015

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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.

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

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

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EXISTING PARADIGMS FOR RESISTANCE IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS CHALLENGED BY KADYROV, ISIS

Kevin Daniel Leahy

With the recent death of its leader and the decisions by numerous field commanders in Dagestan and Chechnya to disassociate themselves with the organization, analysts are wondering if the Caucasus Emirate can endure. The terrorist group calling itself the Islamic State (ISIS) has emerged as the latest paradigm for resistance to Russian rule in the Caucasus. It is, however, only the latest in a long line of such paradigms to take root in the region, competing with the Caucasus Emirate, Chechen nationalism and other forms of ethnic separatism. What is the outlook for ISIS as a paradigm for resistance in the North Caucasus?

BACKGROUND: Killed by pro-Russian security forces in Dagestan on April 19, Aliaskhab Kebedov, otherwise known as Ali Abu Muhammed, may yet go down in history as the last “emir” of the so-called Caucasus Emirate organization. The Emirate was conceived of initially as a means of uniting disparate rebel groups in Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria under a single, mutually acceptable ideological umbrella. The Emirate was proclaimed by the Chechen rebel leader, Doku Umarov, in 2007. In doing so, Umarov forfeited his title as president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, instead casting himself as the emir, or military ruler, of the entire North Caucasus. With this proclamation, Umarov eschewed his previous political objective of securing independence for his native Chechnya, focusing instead on a more ambitious agenda whereby the entire region would be subjected

to a political regime based on the tenets of Islamic law, the Sharia.

From the outset, however, it was clear that a sizable constituency within the Chechen rebel organization was uncomfortable with this new departure. A prolonged sequence of political infighting resulted in Umarov publicly accusing several recalcitrant lieutenants of insubordination. In turn, these opponents cited various shortcomings pertaining to the emir’s style of leadership as the main reason for their truculence. It transpired that Umarov arrived at the decision to proclaim the Emirate in consultation with a small, exclusive group of advisors. Umarov had neglected to involve the most senior Chechen rebel leaders in his deliberations.

If he believed that his seniority and legend within the rebel ranks would convince doubters to set aside any misgivings about the Emirate project, he was mistaken. Some regarded the proclamation as a strategic error;

others simply considered it offensive. This rift within the Chechen rebel organization was never successfully bridged and further diminished the organization's capacity to function militarily, and indeed politically, at a time when it was already under serious pressure on both fronts.

Since becoming the pro-Moscow leader of Chechnya in 2007, Ramzan Kadyrov has been firmly pressing the bounds of Chechnya's political autonomy within the contours of Russia's constitutional framework. Kadyrov's Chechnya has accumulated many of the features of a sovereign state, with its own anthem, flag and legislative assembly. Kadyrov has also assembled a sizable security apparatus, staffed by thousands of native Chechens, tasked with upholding the interests of the pro-Moscow administration both in Chechnya itself and farther afield. Crucially, the administration has also managed to establish a lasting *modus vivendi* with the Russian government, an achievement which has previously eluded all would-be architects of Chechen statehood.

Umarov, meanwhile, saw his authority gradually dwindle during his tenure. Upon his death in 2013, he bequeathed an under-resourced organization blighted by sectarian infighting and severely compromised by government informants. Most importantly, he left behind an organization that is confused about its overall strategy and ideological orientation.



(Source: Wikimedia Commons, B. Ajeganov)

IMPLICATIONS: Umarov is not solely responsible for this state of affairs. A credible argument can be made that a relentless and multi-vectored counter-insurgency campaign waged by Chechnya's pro-Moscow administration has critically degraded the military capabilities of the rebel organization. But it is in the political-ideological sphere that the Kadyrov administration has been most successful. One of the principal complaints about Umarov's leadership was that the Chechen organization's long-standing strategic goal of securing an independent Chechen state was being marginalized.

Clearly, however, such plaintiffs did not recognize the emerging congruity between the traditional vision of an independent Chechnya – as embodied by the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria – and the contemporary reality of Kadyrov's semi-sovereign Chechen republic. But is it possible that Umarov recognized this congruity sooner than his comrades? Is it possible that the development of the Caucasus Emirate project was in some way a tacit acknowledgment that Kadyrov had all but “stolen the clothes” of the Chechen separatist movement?

By so doing, Kadyrov left people like Umarov, who could see no role for themselves in Chechnya's prevailing pro-Moscow order, with a pressing need to establish a new ideological paradigm for continued resistance. This would perhaps account for Umarov's decision in 2007 to abruptly deviate from the orthodox separatist mantra in deference to the ideological formulae of certain rebel ideologues – a majority of whom were based outside Chechnya – who had been demanding the proclamation of a Caucasus-wide Islamic state entity for some time. Paradoxically, if one accepts the premise that Kadyrov's Chechnya has met or exceeded the benchmark of what constituted a minimum level of sovereignty acceptable to the original group of Chechen separatist leaders, then it is possible to conclude that the Caucasus Emirate phenomenon does not in fact represent an evolutionary development in the traditional separatist agenda. Instead, the Emirate can be considered to represent a drastic reaction by Umarov and his confidantes to Kadyrov's effective co-optation and implementation of their original program for a sovereign Chechen state.

As Umarov's successor, Kebedov would also find his ideological paradigm for resisting Russian rule in the North Caucasus challenged by contemporary political developments. In his case it was the influence of ISIS, not Kadyrov's all-encompassing nationalist paradigm in Chechnya, which presented the biggest challenge.

Over the past several years, hundreds of young volunteers from throughout the North Caucasus have been making their way to Syria to fight the Assad regime, with many of them joining the ranks of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's organization. Since the end of 2014, however, there have been several instances whereby insurgent leaders in Dagestan have publicly forsaken the Caucasus Emirate organization and instead pledged their allegiance to al-Baghdadi.

CONCLUSIONS: There was a time when the separatist mantra of the Chechen rebel movement was practically the solitary ideological paradigm for organized resistance to Russian rule in the North Caucasus. Later, following the emergence of Kadyrov as a political force in 2005-2006, this mantra was progressively usurped as a paradigm for resistance. A constituency within the rebel movement subsequently embraced a somewhat elementary ideology grounded in notions of pan-Caucasian solidarity and the perceived utility of Islamic law was as an alternative paradigm.

However, with the advent of the ISIS phenomenon since 2014, it has become clear that a sizable body of opinion with the rebel movement in the North Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan, has deemed the Caucasus Emirate paradigm unfit for purpose. In many respects, the Caucasus Emirate experiment has demonstrated the political difficulties of uniting disparate rebel groups throughout the region under a single, unified

command structure. The rebels' organizational structures throughout the North Caucasus are centrifugal by their inception and there is a sense that the organization in Chechnya was not the only group discommoded by the tendency toward a centralized, autocratic style of leadership under the auspices of the Emirate.

By adopting a new figurehead, an "absentee emir" with little real interest in the affairs of the region, the insurgents in Dagestan and Chechnya who have pledged their allegiance to al-Baghdadi are effectively petitioning for the reintroduction of a more centrifugal paradigm of resistance, one which would render unnecessary the continued authoritarian oversight of a local emir.

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FOOTBALL NATIONALISM AMONG IRAN'S AZERIS

Emil Souleimanov

Tabriz, the capital city of Iran's East Azerbaijan province, and some other key cities in Iranian Azerbaijan saw new mass demonstrations in mid-May. This time, supporters of Tabriz's football club Tractor Sazi, numbering tens of thousands, took to the streets to protest a referee decision in a match against Naft Tehran FC. The decision, which the majority of Azeri protesters considered unfounded, reversed the course of the match and allegedly deprived Tractor Sazi, a football team that has come to embody Azeri Turkic nationalism in the Islamic Republic, of victory in a key match.

BACKGROUND: Ironically, the protests centered on the referee's decision to give a red card to the Tractor Sazi midfielder Andranik Seymourian, a Tehran-born ethnic Armenian, 20 minutes before the end of the match. The referee's highly controversial decision turned the tide of the game, reversing Tractor Sazi's 3:1 lead to a 3:3 draw. Within minutes, the atmosphere in Tehran's Sahand Sport stadium, where dozens of thousands of Iranian Azeri supporters were gathered, quickly shifted from joy to anger. During and following the match, according to eyewitnesses, Tractor Sazi fans in Tehran, Tabriz and elsewhere shouted "Down with Persian racism," "Long Live Azerbaijan," "How happy to be a Turk," "Tabriz, Baku, Ankara. Persia is so far away to us," "South Azerbaijan is not Iran," "Everybody has the right to learn his own language," and other nationalist and emancipatory slogans. Tractor fans clashed with security forces in the Tehran stadium and on the streets of various cities in East Azerbaijan. The governor of the East

Azerbaijan province sought to ease the tension by appealing to the population to remain calm, while publicly challenging the legitimacy of the outcome.

According to Tractor Sazi's Portuguese coach Toni Oliveira, the Tabriz team had been playing defensive after Seymourian's disqualification, not least because the coach was told by representatives of Iran's Football Federation during the game that the results of parallel matches meant that even a draw would suffice for Tractor Sazi to win the championship. "We were tricked," Oliveira later complained to Iranian journalists. In fact, according to numerous testimonies, mobile communication in the stadium was disrupted during the last minutes of the match. On the 87th minute of the match, TV, radio, and cell phones all suddenly blacked out, leaving the Tractor Sazi coach, fans, and players with no information regarding the results of other ongoing games. Several observers within and outside Iran considered the scale of

such interference by authorities unprecedented. Tractor had earlier beaten the Tehran-based Esteghlal FC by 4:1 and a win against Naft Tehran would have brought Tractor the first ever title in the Persian Gulf Pro League, breaking the hegemony of football clubs from Tehran and Isfahan.

IMPLICATIONS: Nationalism is growing among Iranian Azeris, the Islamic theocracy's largest ethno-linguistic community (see the [06/14/06](#); [10/27/10](#); and [10/05/11](#) issues of the CACI Analyst). While on the rise since the early 1990s and particularly during the last decade, what started as an emancipatory movement aimed at establishing education in Azeri Turkish throughout Iran's predominantly Azeri northwest gradually transformed into a relatively strong nationalist movement, now approaching calls for separatism and irredentism. The recent developments have tainted the established image of Iranian Azeris as a perfectly integrated community known for its political apathy. However, due to the strong religious identity prevailing in Iranian Azerbaijan's rural areas, the long-standing tradition of Iranian statehood, and state-supported persianization coupled with the dominance of Persian nationalism, ethnic nationalism is yet to become a decisive ideological force among the twenty million Iranian Azeris.

Yet those publicly supporting Azeri nationalism risk penalization at the hands of Iranian security forces, known for their brutality and

impunity, which has reportedly included extrajudicial executions, severe torture, and sexual abuse. Consequently, while an increasingly large part of Iranian Azeris, particularly secular youth in urban areas, have come to support the ideas of ethnic nationalism, territorial autonomy, and ethno-linguistic emancipation, many have refrained from public protests in order to avoid persecution. Organized dissent in Iran is almost non-existent. Spontaneous mass gatherings have instead been triggered by ecological concerns, as in the case of the dramatic drying out of the Urmiye Lake, considered the jewel of Iranian Azerbaijan; expressions of anti-Azeri bias in the public sphere, as in the case of the 2006 cartoon crisis; and increasingly by sports nationalism, as in the case of Iranian Azerbaijan's most successful and popular football club, deemed by many to represent the flagship of Azeri nationalism.



(Source: Wikimedia Commons, B. Ajeganov)

In fact, in the last 10-15 years, Tractor Sazi FC has become a channel of Iranian Azeri nationalism and an important subculture in its own right. Iranian authorities have so far been reluctant to ban mass gatherings of football fans – due to the immense popularity of this sport in Iran.

Therefore, nationalistically-minded Iranian Azeris (as well as representatives of Iran's other ethnic minorities, for instance Khozestani Arabs) have considered Tractor's matches an occasion to express their growing frustration with what they perceive as state injustice against their ethnic community. Over time, Tractor's fans, self-identifying as "red wolves" with reference to the totemic animal of the Turkic peoples, have come to routinely use Turkish and Azerbaijani flags, symbols, and chants during the matches and on other occasions.

Naturally, Iran's security services are concerned by this development. According to Iranian Azeri sources both in the region and in the diaspora communities, the security services have in recent years successfully infiltrated the ranks of Tractor Sazi's hardcore fans, keeping a watchful eye on their activities. Yet due to the movement's massive character, only large scale arrests could decisively change the makeup of the football club's hardcore fans, an option that Tehran has so far avoided. However, tensions have risen considerably between the Iranian Azeri supporters of the legendary Tebriz club and the predominantly Persian supporters of major clubs from Tehran and Isfahan. During the matches, racist insults are common. Instances of physical clashes between Azeri and Persian supporters have also been on the rise, with authorities outside the Azeri provinces usually backing the Persian fans. Tractor Sazi fans have even acquired a reputation across Iran as fighters who

travel with their club to specifically engage in clashes with the competition. Iranian authorities have frequently accused Tractor's fans of separatism and other "deviations," with dozens of fans subjected to interrogation and hundreds to surveillance.

CONCLUSIONS: As expressions of public protest in Iran are risky and organized dissent is nearly absent, sports nationalism has come to dominate the country's ethno-nationalist discourse particularly in the formerly lethargic predominantly Azeri-populated northwest. In recent years, Tractor Sazi has come to embody the increasingly nationalist mindset and emancipatory aspirations of Iran's largest ethno-linguistic minority. Among Iran's ethnic minorities and beyond, many have been fascinated by the resolve and fervor of the Tebriz fans who, apart from adopting ethnopolitical slogans, have introduced the "European" way of backing their team in Iran. The recent and unprecedented interference of Iranian authorities in the football match attested to the extent of Tehran's concern over the politicization of sports in the country, while also contributing to this politicization. The rise of Tractor Sazi has fuelled suspicion among many Iranians of the disloyalty of the country's Azeri minority – and its sympathies with Caucasian Azeris and Anatolian Turks – with some Iranians increasingly considering the Azeris a "fifth column." In turn, part of Iran's Azeri minority – particularly secular

urban youth – whose relationship with their Persian counterparts has been deteriorating, has become sensitive to the display of anti-Azeri sentiments or pro-Persian attitudes by Iranian authorities. This has reinforced ethnic cleavages in Iranian society.

While Iranian authorities have so far refrained from banning mass gatherings of football fans, they have grown increasingly concerned over the scope of support that the East Azerbaijani football club is receiving in the country's Azeri-populated provinces and beyond. Yet large-scale persecution of Tractor Sazi's supporters would most likely backfire given the football club's symbolic power, which has come to represent an entire region and its people. A more vocal and self-confident ethnic minority – a political nation in the making – is emerging in the Islamic Republic, a novel reality that Iranian authorities should take into consideration.

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KAZAKHSTAN COMPLETES WTO ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS

Nurzhan Zhambekov

Kazakhstan completed its accession negotiations with the World Trade Organization (WTO) on June 10 and will join the WTO later in 2015. This is a milestone in Kazakhstan's economic development. The WTO's member states voted in favor of Kazakhstan's accession at a meeting in Geneva on June 22, 2015. Whereas the economic impact is currently difficult to assess, the reduction in trade tariffs should in theory improve the competitiveness of Kazakhstan's economy, leading to higher economic growth. In practice, Kazakhstan's experience within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) has not been positive, as Kazakh producers have struggled to compete with larger Russian companies. Kazakh consumers are likely to benefit from Kazakhstan's upcoming membership in the WTO, while Kazakh producers will face increasing international competition.

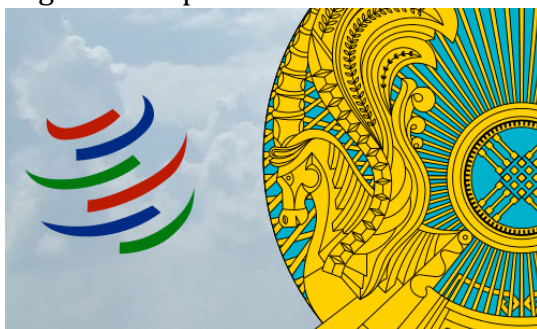
BACKGROUND: Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbaev stated on June 22, 2015 that Kazakhstan completed its accession negotiations to join the WTO in Geneva. The Kazakh leader stated that membership in the WTO would provide Central Asia's largest economy with new horizons by opening up access to a larger market for Kazakhstan's firms and a wider selection of goods and services to Kazakh consumers. Kazakhstan will become the second Central Asian state to join the WTO following Kyrgyzstan's accession over 10 years ago. Kazakhstan's accession to the WTO will speed up the country's integration into the global economy.

According to a statement from the WTO, Kazakhstan completed talks over the terms under which Kazakhstan would join the global trade organization at a working party meeting held on June 10, 2015.

Kazakhstan originally submitted its application to join the WTO in 1996. According to the WTO, the accession negotiations were among the longest and most challenging in the WTO's history. Kazakhstan's application process has been complicated due to its simultaneous membership in the EEU, comprising Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan announced that it would join the Eurasian Customs Union in June 2009 and has been an EEU member since its foundation. As a result, Kazakhstan transformed large portions of its trade regime in accordance with EEU legal instruments, and adjusted amended most of its customs practices and tariffs to those of the Russian Federation.

The major stumbling block delaying the completion of negotiations was tariff adjustment, requiring the

resolution of differences between bilateral market-access agreements that Kazakhstan has negotiated with WTO members and the common external tariff of the EEU. Kazakhstan worked bilaterally and multilaterally with the WTO members to complete its accession negotiations and resolve specific issues of bilateral and multilateral interest. In addition, the Kazakh government stated that the disagreements over agricultural subsidies were a major hurdle in the accession talks. The Kazakh government made clear that it intended to preserve the right to increase agricultural subsidies to ten percent of agricultural output, a level permitted for developing countries under the WTO rules and regulations. It is not yet known whether Kazakhstan has achieved that goal. Moreover, export subsidies, tax discrimination in favor of domestic agricultural goods, intellectual property protection, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, import licensing procedures, government procurement practices, local content requirements in investment contracts and purchases by state-owned enterprises were outstanding issues to be resolved in the accession negotiations process.



(Source: Wikimedia Commons, Ajeganov B.)

IMPLICATIONS: Local Kazakh experts do not foresee major changes due to Kazakhstan's upcoming membership in the WTO. According to Kazakh economist Aidarkhan Khusainov, WTO membership is comparable to membership in the United Nations; it is mostly political and good for the country's image. In Khusainov's assessment, despite neighboring Kyrgyzstan's membership in the WTO for the last 10 years, the Kyrgyz economy did not experience major growth. Mukhtar Taizhan, an activist and former economist, believes that Kazakhstan will benefit from the WTO membership, particularly through improved export opportunities for Kazakh businesses, increased competition in the domestic market, improvement in the quality of goods, and a decrease in prices for imported goods. In addition, Taizhan believes that WTO membership does not conflict with Kazakhstan's current membership in the EEU because Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Russia are already members of both the EEU and the WTO.

It is currently difficult to assess the likely implications of Kazakhstan's WTO membership. The Kazakh government will make the details of the accession public later in 2015. In principle, a reduction of tariffs should improve the competitiveness of the Kazakh economy, leading to higher economic growth. The major concern among Kazakhstan's producers is that the WTO membership will likely lead to higher imports and increase competition, which may have negative

implications for Kazakh producers, who do not believe they can increase exports to equal the increase in potential imports. This risk is compounded in the short term by the relatively strong tenge (the Kazakh currency), and political uncertainty in the medium to long-term outlook, as there is no clear succession mechanism after Nazarbaev's eventual departure from the political scene.

These two major factors will have a negative impact on domestic investment and production in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's recent experience with the EEU has not been encouraging. Kazakh producers have struggled to compete against larger Russian firms and Kazakh firms will face even larger challenges from multinational firms with global business operations. It is yet uncertain how much and for how long the Kazakh government can subsidize its agricultural sector, which is a substantial source of employment providing over 20 percent of Kazakhstan's jobs. The eventual reduction in subsidies to the agricultural sector can impact the labor market negatively by pushing up unemployment in the short to medium term.

In addition, Kazakhstan's government currently limits foreign ownership in the telecom sector to a maximum of 49 percent. This restriction will have to be lifted as a precondition for Kazakhstan's WTO membership. In addition, the current 49 percent restriction on foreign capital in joint ventures supplying architectural,

urban planning, construction and engineering services will be eliminated, according to Kairat Umarov, Kazakhstan's ambassador to the U.S. Legal entities in Kazakhstan with 100 percent foreign ownership will be allowed to provide services. The eventual removal of restrictions in major sectors will have far-reaching implications for the Kazakh economy. Balancing the implementation of Kazakhstan's key economic priorities and the development of processing industries with the country's commitment to the WTO will present a major challenge for Kazakhstan's policymakers.

The major beneficiaries of Kazakhstan's accession to the WTO will be Kazakhstan's consumers, as the quality of goods and services will improve and the price of goods and services will likely decrease. In contrast, Kazakh businesses will face new challenges competing against foreign rivals, as Kazakhstan's economy opens to all 161 members of the WTO, not just the EEU members. Finally, if oil prices increase in the near future, the Kazakh tenge may appreciate, thereby putting additional pressure on Kazakh producers in the form of higher labor costs and cheaper imports.

CONCLUSIONS: After almost 20 years of accession negotiations with the WTO, Kazakhstan has completed its talks and will join the global trade organization later this year. Although the details and conditions of its accession to the WTO are not yet public, it will have both negative and

positive effects on Kazakhstan's economy. In the near term, Kazakh producers will struggle in the more competitive business environment. In contrast, Kazakh consumers will enjoy a wider selection of cheaper and higher quality imported goods. Despite the potential challenges for the Kazakh economy in the near to medium term, the increased business competition will provide ample opportunities to improve Kazakhstan's business climate in the long term and help the Kazakh government diversify its economy away from its dependence on oil.

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AZERBAIJAN AND THE EU

Natalia Konarzewska

Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev made a last-minute decision not to attend the European Union's May 21–22 Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Riga, citing the need to focus on the upcoming European Olympic Games, which were about to start in Baku. However, high-ranking officials quoted in the media asserted that president Aliyev did not attend the summit due to Western criticism towards Azerbaijan. Baku also expressed dissatisfaction with the summit's results as Azerbaijan hoped to receive more vocal Western support for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Instead, attention was focused on human rights violations in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's relationship with the EU is becoming increasingly strained and displays growing disappointment from both sides.

BACKGROUND: In 2014, rapidly building political and military pressure in Eurasia, caused by the conflict in Ukraine, has presented Azerbaijan with the problem of continuing its multidimensional and balanced foreign policy while simultaneously securing the longevity of its ruling regime. In a tactic policy shift, Baku started developing more positive relations with Russia, reflected in strengthened cooperation in the political and military spheres. It appears that Azerbaijani authorities, concerned over the conflict in Ukraine, feel a need to pacify Russia. These concerns are exacerbated by the prolonged conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which dangerously flared up in August 2014, and the existence of ethnic minorities (especially Lezgins and Talysh), which make Azerbaijan vulnerable to external pressure.

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and Azerbaijan's assumption of the chairmanship of the Council of Europe in 2014, Azerbaijan took a more confrontational stance vis-à-vis

with the West, embarking on a sustained crackdown on the political opposition and civil society. Authorities mostly targeted political leaders, independent journalists, human rights activists and media outlets, which were known for their pro-democratic and pro-Western stance. The unprecedented crackdown drew harsh criticism from the U.S. and EU, and Azerbaijani authorities responded with uncharacteristic anti-Western propaganda, similar to the Kremlin's.



(Source: Wikimedia Commons, Ajeganov B.)

There are several reasons for Azerbaijan's changing attitude towards the EU. First, Baku is growing dissatisfied with the lack of progress in

resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and expects the same strong vocal support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity as the West is giving Ukraine. Azerbaijan strongly objected to wording in the Riga Summit Final Declaration on the settlement of territorial conflicts in the EaP area. Baku insisted that the declaration should contain four UN resolutions on the conflict. This wording was rejected by European partners as too detailed and finally Azerbaijan was allowed to prepare an additional statement including the UN resolutions.

Problems exist also in bilateral energy cooperation. Despite promoting the Southern Gas Corridor (SCG) as the EU's flagship gas diversification project, Brussels has done little to determine its route and securing funding, leaving this issue for Azerbaijan and Turkey to settle. Azerbaijan also expected more political support from Brussels in deciding the shape of the SGC. In 2013, Baku opted for the Trans-Adriatic pipeline in favor of the more commercially viable and geopolitically significant Nabucco West pipeline. Azerbaijan feared retaliation from Russia, because Moscow was at that time promoting its own South Stream project, which was targeting roughly the same markets as Nabucco West. Moreover, in November 2014, the European Commission launched an investigation to determine whether Azerbaijan's oil company SOCAR's proposed acquisition of the Greek gas transmission system operator DESFA

is in line with the EU Merger Regulation. The investigation is considerably slowing down the realization of the Trans-Adriatic pipeline, a vital part of the SGC.

IMPLICATIONS: The EU's rather meek reaction towards previous cases of human rights violations and the West's ineffectual reaction to Russia's aggression in Ukraine has induced Baku to become more assertive in demonstrating that it can resist external pressure to democratize and respect human rights. Nevertheless, aligning with Moscow and jeopardizing relations with the West could have several costly external and internal implications for Azerbaijan.

A strategy aimed at placating Russia in order to mitigate possible aggressive moves from Moscow's side may prove ineffectual in the long run. Internationally isolated Russia is searching for allies and will likely continue to pressure Azerbaijan to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Baku is unlikely to succumb to this idea because it prefers to retain an independent foreign policy and rely on bilateral political and economic ties. Moreover, closer relations with Azerbaijan will not prevent Russia from exploiting its southern neighbor's internal vulnerabilities such as the unresolved dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh and the country's ethnic minorities.

Sustaining Azerbaijan's authoritarian stability may also prove problematic in the long run. Plummeting oil prices and economic turmoil in the Russian market negatively impact Azerbaijan's

economy. The drop in oil prices has resulted in a severe decline of export revenues, which has in turn put pressure on the national currency, manat. Simultaneously, the precarious economic situation in Russia has drastically reduced the remittances from Azerbaijani labor migrants and as a result the income of many Azerbaijani families. So far, Azerbaijan has been able to mitigate the negative effects of falling oil prices on the country's economy, however, the measures taken, such as a devaluation of the manat, have increased the economic hardship of ordinary people. While Baku is surely prepared to withstand the protracted fall of global oil prices, the uncertain economic situation, inflating prices, possible lay-offs in the hydrocarbon sector and downscaling of large infrastructural projects could cause an upsurge of public discontent, especially since in the past hydrocarbon revenues were used to build societal support for the government.

Islamic movements, which increasingly engage in socio-political activism, could become a powerful channel for public discontent. Even though Azerbaijani authorities keep Islamic movements under tight control, the marginalization of secular opposition can result in a growth in the popularity of Islamic movements and Islamic radicalism.

At this point, Azerbaijan's authoritarian system is highly stable. Nevertheless, long-term economic and political trends can

negatively affect its longevity. A first risk is associated with the country's economic over-reliance on hydrocarbon revenues. Azerbaijan is seeking to mitigate the negative impact of this phenomenon by implementing measures focused on non-oil sector growth and has established an oil fund to minimize the negative effect of the volatility in oil prices on the economy. Nevertheless, diversifying the economy will take a long time and further economic shocks caused by oil price volatility will affect citizens' livelihood and trigger public discontent. This issue is related to a second, political, risk as eradicating secular channels of discontent may fuel the growth of Islamic movements and in the future Islamic radicalism. It cannot be excluded that in a long term perspective, Baku will face domestic pressure to loosen its authoritarian control and reconsider the democratization agenda promoted by the EU and U.S.

Azerbaijan's confrontational policy towards the West does not aim to jeopardize relations with the EU and U.S. but to demonstrate that Azerbaijan will not succumb to Western pressure for democratization. Azerbaijan is disappointed with the EU's role in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and Brussels' ineffectual engagement in settling the conflict in Ukraine is seen in Baku as a further indication of its inability and unwillingness to assist Azerbaijan on this issue. Nonetheless, Western engagement in monitoring the ceasefire agreement and diplomatic

and confidence-building efforts should not be underestimated and Azerbaijan might need the EU's mediation and diplomatic assistance if the conflict seriously heats up.

CONCLUSIONS: A failure to meet each other's expectations has strained relations between Azerbaijan and the EU. Azerbaijan is willing to cooperate with EU only on its own terms, emphasizing security and energy issues while eschewing democratization. While Baku expects political support from the EU in realizing the SGC and settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the EU has been unable to coordinate its energy, foreign and security policy to substantially engage in these areas. On the other hand, Brussels criticizes Azerbaijan for human rights violations and expects Baku to conduct democratic reforms, pressures that Baku will at present hardly succumb to. Instead, Baku is primarily interested in a liberalization of the visa regime, which is by far the most likely area of political cooperation with EU. Relations will likely be limited to energy issues without a deeper political and economic partnership.

However, despite the recent problems in Azerbaijan–EU relations, they are unlikely to develop into a more serious crisis. From an economic standpoint, Azerbaijan needs the EU as a main trade partner and a market for its hydrocarbons. Likewise, the EU remains interested in diversifying its gas suppliers and supply routes and will hardly adopt harsher measures

against Azerbaijan, such as sanctions in response to human rights violations.

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RUSSIA ENHANCES ITS SOFT POWER IN GEORGIA THROUGH LOCAL NGOs

Eka Janashia

Anti-western rhetoric has in recent years gained momentum in Georgian social networks, online media, and some radio and television channels. Behind the trend, observers easily detect Russian “soft power” promoted by certain Georgian non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

An “Initiative group,” committed to inform the public about actions aiming to undermine Georgia’s independence, published the report “Russian influence on the Georgian non-governmental organizations and the media.” The document lists numerous pro-Russian NGOs, founded in Georgia mostly after the Georgian Dream (GD) ruling coalition’s ascent to power in 2012, and presents a detailed analysis of their makeup and modus operandi.

According to the research, pro-Russian propaganda in Georgia’s civil sector stems from two key organizations: the “Eurasian Institute” (EI) and “Eurasian Choice” (EC), which have further spawned several other organizations and platforms.

EI is a founder of the “Young Political Scientists Club” and the “People’s Movement of Georgian-Russian Dialogue and Cooperation,” and is also a partner of “Historical Legacy” and the information portals “Sakinformi” and “Iverioni.” Historical Legacy, in turn, founded the online portal “Georgia and the World” (Geworld.ge). EI closely cooperates with various

Russian organizations, including the “Caucasian Scientific Society.”

Another set of pro-Russian organizations – the “Erekle II Society” and the internet television “Patriot TV” are united under EC’s umbrella. The latter is also a partner of the “International Eurasian Movement,” led by prominent the ideologist of Kremlin expansionist policy Alexander Dugin.

While EI mainly focuses on analytical activities and outreach through organizing conferences and workshops, EC is committed to social activities by arranging protest rallies and demonstrations. The functional diversity makes the organizations effective in enhancing Russian soft power and churning anti-western rhetoric throughout Georgia.

Notably, the founders of pro-Russian NGOs as well as the participants of their conferences and meetings are mostly the same people. For example, the former public defender Nana Devdariani is a founder of several pro-Russian organizations, including “Caucasian Cooperation,” “The Center of Global Studies” and “People’s Orthodox Christian Movement.” The leader of EC, Archil Chkoidze, a person frequently quoted by Russian propaganda media, simultaneously established “Erekle II Society.”

As for cultural activities, EI conducts free Russian language courses for Georgian citizens with support of the Russian state-funded organization "Russkiy Mir." Another Russian organization, "Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund," launched the "Russian-Georgian Society Center" in Tbilisi which, among other activities, organizes tours for Georgian journalists in Russia.

In parallel, the multimedia project "Sputnik," which is known as the locomotive of Russian propaganda media internationally, has also recently expanded its activities in Georgia. Although Georgia's National Communications Commission deprived Sputnik of its radio broadcasting license, it has managed to secure a place in Georgia's internet space by actively posting video materials and radio stories. Only a small share of pro-Russian NGOs in Georgia make the sources of their funding public.

The Initiative Group's research unveils that Georgia's pro-Russian NGOs are promoting a shift in public attitudes towards issues that were previously supported by a vast majority of the population. In a referendum held in 2008, 75 percent of the voters supported Georgia's accession to NATO. Although the Georgian government has declared their country's Euro-Atlantic course irreversible and that Georgia remains a committed partner to NATO and a contributor to Euro-Atlantic security, pro-Russian NGOs are cogently styling the West as an oppressor, propagating

that it just needs "cheap" Georgian soldiers for its missions and will exploit the country's territory for deployment of NATO bases and anti-missile weapons. A new referendum is therefore one of the priorities on the agenda of these NGOs.

Another component of the anti-Western discourse includes xenophobic and homophobic narratives where the U.S. and EU are depicted as destructive forces and threats to traditional social institutions in Georgia and Russia as a powerful defender of Orthodox Christianity. Most Georgians believe that Christianity is the foundation of their identity and faith the only means by which their culture can be preserved in the context of intensified globalization. Russian ideologists seek to leverage conservative attitudes among Georgians to alter the perceptions ensuing after the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, which strengthened the view of the Kremlin as the enemy and enhanced public support for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation. By labeling the EU as a protector of LGBT rights, Moscow seeks to change its role as an occupant into that of a generous guardian of Georgia's historical values and identity. In this sense, the Kremlin also casts itself as a force against Islamic expansion. In 2014, EI along with the Institute of Strategic Studies, held a roundtable on the topic "Islamic ideology and security problems of the Caucasian region." Pro-Russian NGOs promote an anti-Turkish narrative in Georgia and encourage the idea that it

is better to be under Russian influence than becoming an object of the Islamic State's expansion.

Another theme relates to the Kremlin's "constructive" role in the resolution of Georgia's conflicts. Proponents of this approach insist that if Georgia changes its Euro-Atlantic course and restore its strategic partnership with Russia, the latter will certainly support a peaceful settlement of the conflicts.

According to the report, the pro-Russian lineup has supporters in both the executive and legislative branches of the government. For example, the parliamentary majority member Gogi Topadze is well known for his anti-NATO statements.

While the activities of pro-Kremlin NGOs in Georgia will not easily affect the country's foreign policy priorities, they will certainly contribute to the polarization of an already fragmented Georgian society and against the background of the country's ongoing economic crisis, will also increase the skepticism of Western values.

BISHKEK AND TASHKENT FACE UNEASY RELATIONS

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On June 10, Kyrgyzstan marked the fifth anniversary of the tragic inter-ethnic violence that claimed more than 400 lives, displaced tens of thousands of people and destroyed thousands of households. In the aftermath of the bloody events, the President of neighboring Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, issued a statement that third forces provoked the clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and the Kyrgyz leadership agreed. However, recent developments indicate that Karimov's position vis-à-vis the authorities in Bishkek and the conflict has changed into a more confrontational stance.

Karimov's changing mood became apparent after his remarks to his Kyrgyz counterpart at the informal summit of the CIS states held in Moscow on May 8, in connection with the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the victory against Nazi Germany. At the summit, Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev stated that, "It is of course sad that not everybody could make it to this summit because, to some extent, it is a tribute and respect for fathers and grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers who were in the war. I think that this day should remain in the memory of all countries because the future will punish those who forget the past."

In response to this statement, the Uzbek President said that every

democratically elected leader is in a position to decide what to celebrate and where, and no one has the right to force his opinion on others. Karimov continued by referring to his Kyrgyz colleague as simply "Almaz" and described his statements as incorrect and tactless. Atambayev interfered, stating that he was simply expressing his opinion, but Karimov ironically interrupted him by saying, "We all know your opinion already."

Nevertheless, during his bilateral talks with the United Nations' Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Karimov described the June 2010 events in southern Kyrgyzstan as a full-scale war. "Power holders in Kyrgyzstan did not draw any conclusions. The causes of the conflict need to be investigated at an international level," Karimov noted, despite the fact that the inter-ethnic clashes were investigated by a national as well as an international commission led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This is in stark contrast to the Andijan massacre of 2005, which were never evaluated either by national or international commissions.

Yet Karimov touched on a weak spot by pointing to Kyrgyzstan's failure to bring the perpetrators to justice. Well-respected international human rights organizations have also called on the Kyrgyz authorities to retry all those

convicted following the June 2010 inter-ethnic clashes, a trial that according to them saw ethnic Uzbeks sentenced at a higher proportion than their Kyrgyz counterparts. Such a retrial would involve the case of the human rights defender and ethnic Uzbek Azimjan Askarov, sentenced to life for organizing mass disturbances and instigating inter-ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010. According to Rachel Denber of Human Rights Watch, "In the case of Azimjan Askarov, the Kyrgyz justice system has utterly failed to deliver justice. The case was riddled with blatant flaws from start to finish, and it is astounding that the court did not order a thorough investigation into the way it was conducted."

In general, Bishkek-Tashkent relations have always been uneasy. The two countries have been divided not only over the ethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan, but also on numerous border conflicts and the constant struggle for water resources. According to local political analysts, Karimov's increasingly critical statements addressed to Bishkek might be guided by geopolitical interests. In a number of interviews, Uzbekistan's president has stated that Tashkent will not enter the Eurasian Economic Union, the Customs Union or any other alliance that is reminiscent of the Soviet Union, unlike Bishkek, which is pursuing the opposite foreign policy.

Also, earlier this year Kyrgyzstan approved the sale of its gas network to

Russia's Gazprom for the symbolic price of US\$ 1 and is now receiving its energy supplies without any delay. This has removed Tashkent's leverage, which it has previously deployed to bully Bishkek by cutting off supplies during winter. Such developments, along with Bishkek re-equipping its military with the Kremlin's assistance might be indeed irritants to power holders in Tashkent.

TAJIKISTAN'S ISLAMIC RESISTANCE PARTY STRUGGLES TO SURVIVE

Oleg Salimov

The leader of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) Mukhiddin Kabiri gave an extensive press conference during the conference "Central Asia – Current Challenges" in Moscow, organized by Russian and Tajik educational and policy research institutions. In particular, Kabiri emphasized the growing confrontation between IRPT and Tajikistan's government headed by Emomali Rakhmon. Kabiri, currently living in Turkey in self-imposed exile after his party was ousted from parliament in March 2015 elections, spoke about his fear of returning to Tajikistan due to political persecution. Official Dushanbe has yet to comment on Kabiri's allegations.

Prior to March 2015, IRPT was the largest opposition party in the Tajik parliament, counting up to 40,000 active members. IRPT is a formal successor to the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), which it dominated during the Tajik Civil War. IRPT controlled the opposition's armed forces and coordinated UTO's efforts during the peace negotiations in 1994-97. IRPT is the only officially registered Islamic party in the former Soviet Central Asia, whose status became possible due to the peace accords signed by the UTO's previous leader Said Abdullo Nuri and

Tajikistan's president Rakhmon in 1997.

IRPT has previously accused the Tajik government of violating the provisions of the peace accords in 1998, 1999, and 2000. Initially, according to the peace accords, the opposition received 30 percent of the seats in government. Consistent persecution and manipulations allowed Rakhmon to entirely expel the opposition from government. In 2003, IRPT protested new amendments to the constitution, which allowed another reelection of Rakhmon. In 2005, IRPT denounced the parliamentary elections as rigged. In the 2010 elections, IRPT gained 8.2 percent of the votes. IRPT rejected the results of the last parliamentary elections when it gained only 1.6 percent of the votes. At the same time, the party emphasized the peaceful character of their protest and condemned possible outbursts of violence by its supporters.

The harassment of IRPT progressed considerably greatly after the 2010 elections. In the wake of attacks by Islamists in Tajikistan's Rasht region in fall 2010, the government initiated a series of actions aimed to intimidate IRPT. Thus, the IRPT's headquarters in Dushanbe were searched and documents and computers seized. Soon thereafter, the IRPT's all-women

mosque was set on fire. In early 2011, official Tajik media started an attack against IRPT, intended to demonize the party and its leadership.

These tactics continued up until the 2015 elections. Human rights groups reported several arrests of IRPT activists at the end of 2013. The leader of the IRPT cell in Badakhshan, Saodatsho Adolatov, received a five-year prison term in January 2014. Also, a series of discrediting reports and videos on immoral behavior of IRPT's regional leaders was published in the media and social networks. IRPT denounced these reports and videos as false. In August 2014, the government newspaper *Jumkhuriat* published an extensive article comparing IRPT to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. Most recently, IRPT reported the arrest of Kurbon Mannonov, the leader of the IRPT cell in Nurek on June 10, 2015.

After losing last parliamentary elections, some members of IRPT and Islamic clergy called for a dissolution of the party, which they believe has become ineffective and has discredited itself. The call was widely publicized by official Tajik media. The same media depicted Kabiri and his family's departure to Turkey as an escape from Tajikistan, which only intensified speculations on the IRPT's termination. During his press conference, Kabiri stated that he is not planning to return to Tajikistan due to the criminal investigation opened against him. Kabiri considers the investigation a pretext of the Tajik

government to cover up political persecution against IRPT and himself.

Kabiri characterized his party's future in Tajikistan as uncertain due to intensified persecution. Kabiri announced that IRPT has submitted an open letter to Rakhmon, describing the discrimination and harassment of IRPT's leadership and members, following up on a 189-page appeal to Tajik parliament and law enforcement. IRPT calls on Rakhmon to observe the conditions listed in the peace accords of 1997. It should be noted that soon after the elections, the Tajik Islamic extremist group Jamoat Ansarulloh posted an online death threat to Kabiri for cooperating with Rakhmon. Andrei Serenko, an expert at the Russian Research Center of Contemporary Afghanistan, suspects that the threat was staged not by extremists but by Tajik security services to explain the future assassination of Kabiri.

The post-Civil War reconciliation provided Tajikistan with a unique opportunity to become the most progressive new state among the Central Asian republics by recognizing and allowing the only Islamic party to take part in the state building processes. However, the intimidation and suppression of IRPT and its leadership exhibits a devaluation of democratic principles and advancement of authoritarianism in Tajikistan. Also, the persecution of moderate Islam, as represented by IRPT, can provoke the growth of extremism and radicalism among its followers.

ARMENIA AND IRAN HOLD POLITICAL CONSULTATIONS

Erik Davtyan

In June 2015, Armenia and Iran held numerous talks on political and economic cooperation, energy security, and the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. On June 10, Armenia's ambassador to Iran, Artashes Tumanyan, met with Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the chairman of the Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security of Iran's Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament). Boroujerdi welcomed the fact that Armenia and Iran pursue a high-level political dialogue and successfully cooperate at the level of parliaments, emphasizing the unique role of the Armenian Diaspora in Iran's development. In turn, Ambassador Tumanyan stressed the importance of deepening political dialogue and economic exchange and expressed his gratitude to Iranian authorities for the warm attitude towards Iranian Armenians and the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage in Iran. Touching upon the current turmoil in the Middle East and security issues, the Armenian ambassador stated that all regional issues should be solved only by political means and that Armenia runs a constructive and balanced policy in this context.

The official political dialogue between the two neighboring states continued in the following days in Yerevan. On June 11, the President of Armenia's National Assembly Galust Sahakyan received the head of the Friendship Group Armenia-Iran Ali Qaidi and

other members of the group. The parties discussed the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, as well as issues related to Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), parliamentary cooperation and especially the activity of the Friendship Group. On June 12, Iranian members of the Friendship Group were received by Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandian. Nalbandian stressed the importance of political dialogue at both the executive and legislative levels and emphasized that several Armenians are engaged in Iranian parliamentary affairs as deputies in the Islamic Consultative Assembly.

Simultaneously, on June 11-12 Armenian officials held separate consultations with another Iranian delegation. The consultations were headed by the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs Shavarsh Kocharyan and Ibrahim Rahimpour. According to the press release of Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the activation of political dialogue and enhancing cooperation in energy, trade-economic, and humanitarian fields bilaterally as well as in the framework of international organizations were on the agenda of the consultations. The counterparts also discussed the realization of joint economic projects in detail. Along with issues of common concern, the interlocutors reciprocally presented the current developments on top priority issues in Armenia's and

Iran's foreign policies. Kocharyan presented the efforts of Armenia and the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs towards the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In turn, Rahimpour briefed on the recent developments in the negotiation process on Iran's nuclear program. On June 14, Ambassador Tumanyan met with Iran's Minister of Petroleum Bijan Namdar Zangeneh and discussed issues relating to bilateral economic and energy cooperation.

Despite the active and regular interaction between Armenian and Iranian authorities, it is obvious that the vague perspective of constructing a new railway is still the most important problem on the two states' official mutual agenda. By connecting its railway network to Iran's, Armenia seeks to circumvent the dual embargo by Turkey and Azerbaijan (imposed more than 20 years ago) and receive the status of a transit state, thereby raising its international importance. For Iran, the new railway will open new opportunities for linking the Persian Gulf through Iran to the Black Sea basin. According to *News.am*, Tumanyan declared that Iranian authorities will build 60 kilometers of the railway, reaching the Armenian-Iranian state border. Regarding the existing difficulties for this infrastructural program, the Armenian ambassador explained that the construction of an Iran-Armenia railway needs a colossal investment, hence "the railway will be constructed as soon as financial needs are satisfied."

Tumanyan also said that "Armenia aims at linking Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union" and added that "the members of the EEU are also interested in a broader cooperation with Iran". In August 2014, the Armenian government approved the railway project at a cost of approximately US\$ 3.5 billion. Armenia has to build a nearly 300 kilometer-long section of the railway, the construction of which is estimated to be completed in 2022.