

# Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING VOL. 13 NO. 13 6 JULY 2011

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute  
Silk Road Studies Program*



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# THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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

## **Svante E. Cornell**

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# BAGAPSH'S DEATH AND KOKOITY'S ENDING REIGN WILL TEST RUSSIA'S INFLUENCE IN ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

Johanna Popjanevski

*Following the sudden passing of Abkhaz de facto President Sergei Bagapsh in May, Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia will hold a snap Presidential election on August 26. This coincides with South Ossetian leader Kokoity serving his last few months in office: unless the South Ossetian constitution is amended, Kokoity will have to step down and allow for elections in November. The outcome of the two elections is unlikely to have a considerable impact on the post-2008 status quo in the region. However – in Abkhazia in particular – the election processes will test the level influence enjoyed by Russia in the two regions and, as such, constitute an important measurement of their independence from Moscow.*

**BACKGROUND:** Abkhazia's *de facto* President Sergei Bagapsh was serving his second term in office when he passed away in Moscow on May 29, 2011, following complications after a lung surgery. The 62-year-old politician was first elected in 2004, succeeding the Soviet-minded leader Vladislav Ardzinba. Bagapsh won in that election an important victory against Raoul Khajimba, who was openly supported by Russia. The election resulted in a stand-off between Sukhumi and Moscow, which was resolved by a compromise through which Khajimba was given the post of vice president. Thus, the 2004 election marked an important road mark in Abkhazia's strive for independence, as it demonstrated the unwillingness by the Abkhaz leadership and people to be directed by Moscow. Since then, however, Russia has gradually managed to reposition itself on Abkhazia's political scene. Over the years following the 2004 election, a pro-Russian opposition movement, the Forum for Public Union, emerged and established itself as a voice for those critical of Bagapsh's policies, especially his failure to gain international support for Abkhazia's

independence. Thus, over the last years Bagapsh has faced a difficult task in balancing the interest of the pro-independence camp as well as those more inclined towards association with Russia. Indeed, the late leader managed this task well: in the elections in 2009 Bagapsh secured a second term in office in the elections in 2009 – defeating again Khajimba who heads the Forum movement. Bagapsh, who was married to an ethnic Georgian, also enjoyed support in the minority populated regions, including the Georgian-populated region of Gali in Southern Abkhazia.

The snap election following Bagapsh's death is scheduled for August 26. From the ruling elite, acting *de facto* President Alexander Ankvab and Prime Minister Sergei Shamba are expected to run. Both these candidates belonged to the United Abkhazia movement that challenged Ardzinba in the 2004 election. Ankvab was then perhaps the strongest candidate, but was prevented from running due to not having lived in Abkhazia for five years. Instead, Ankvab backed Bagapsh as the movement's candidate, assuming the role as Prime Minister, and, after

the 2009 elections, as Bagapsh's Vice President. Shamba for his part ran separately for the post of President in both the 2004 and 2009 elections, but failed to secure sufficient support. Nonetheless, Shamba, who prior to becoming Prime Minister served as the region's Foreign Minister, has a reputation of being a strong diplomat and has long been Abkhazia's spokesperson at the international level. From the opposition, Raoul Khajimba and the local businessman Beslan Butba are likely candidates.

Meanwhile, in South Ossetia, de facto President Eduard Kokoity is also serving his second, and, according to the South Ossetian constitution, last term in office. Kokoity, a 47-year-old former Soviet wrestling champion, has been in power in Tskhinvali since 2001 when, according to credible sources, the Russian leadership called him back from Moscow to South Ossetia to run against then-leader Lyudvig Chibirov. Since then, Kokoity has remained loyal to Moscow, but in recent years Russia's support for has appeared to be fading. Elections in South Ossetia are scheduled for November, although there are speculations as to whether Kokoity will try to postpone the elections to achieve constitutional amendments to allow him to run for a third term. However, the South Ossetian Supreme Court recently ruled out such a possibility, which led a group of Kokoity's supporters to storm the South Ossetian parliament in protest. While it remains to be seen whether Kokoity will attempt to cling on to power, the recent controversies in South Ossetia proves that the South Ossetian leader no longer enjoys unconditional domestic support.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Bagapsh's death, and the potential succession of power in South Ossetia, constitutes the first true test of the political climate in the two regions after the 2008 war

between Georgia and Russia. With regard to Abkhazia, when Sukhumi held its 2009 election, the public sentiments in the region were still euphoric over Russia's recognition of the region's independence. The post-2008 period also saw a rapid influx of Russian economic and military aid to Abkhazia, which allowed for ambitious modernization projects in the region's capital and northern parts. However, such developments in Abkhazia soon showed their downside. While the novelty of Abkhaz tourism brought a wave of Russian citizens to Sukhumi and the Gagra regions in 2009, 2010 saw a significant decrease in tourism to Abkhazia. Poor service and over-pricing appeared to outweigh the curiosity factor involved in travelling to the region. Moreover, a row over property rights in 2010 suggested that Russia's increasing presence in the region is not entirely a blessing for the Abkhazian leadership, which maintains that it enjoys an independent standing from Moscow. However, the willingness of the Abkhaz leadership to challenge Moscow's influence in any determined way remains doubtful.

Thus, the upcoming election in Abkhazia is important, as it will measure both the public sentiments vis-à-vis Moscow after the 2008 events, as well as the level of influence that Russia wields over Abkhaz politics. At the same time, Russia is aware of this fact and may thus refrain from any obvious interference in the election process. Influential Russian Member of Parliament Konstantin Zatulin recently stated that "I think Russia can afford not to involve in Abkhazia's elections", and "it is obvious that the elections will not damage Russian interests". Indeed, he is prone to be right. None of the expected candidates are likely to embark on a policy path much different from the present, especially not regarding relations with



Sergei Bagapsh

Tbilisi. It instead remains to be seen how the next Abkhaz leader will tackle the task of balancing Abkhazia's strive for independence on the one hand, and the region's relations with Moscow on the other. Indeed, whoever will replace Bagapsh has big boots to fill in this regard.

The case of South Ossetia is in many ways different from Abkhazia. While Sukhumi has an articulated desire for independence, the Tskhinvali authorities, which in part are the result of direct secondments by Moscow, have been far more ambivalent regarding the region's future status. Indeed, Kokoity has made statements both confirming and denying the region's ambitions to achieve independence as opposed to integration with Russia. Overall, there is little doubt that South Ossetia's policy path is largely dictated by the Kremlin. For this reason, the South Ossetian public is likely to have little say regarding the choice of its next

leader. However, just like in Abkhazia, the circumstances surrounding the potential election in Tskhinvali will inevitably prove a point with regard to the standing of the region.

**CONCLUSIONS:** While the upcoming elections in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are unlikely to challenge the post-2008 deadlock in the region, the next few months will be telling in that they will indicate the level of Russian influence over and interference in the political processes in the two regions three years after the 2008 events. This is particularly important with regard to Abkhazia, where the

issue of the leadership's dependence on Russia is less clear-cut than in South Ossetia. Tbilisi in particular is likely to watch the developments closely, as any signs of fraud or interference by Russia will serve to strengthen the Georgian government's argument that Moscow is directing the political scene in Georgia's breakaway regions. The West has also reason to watch closely, as the upcoming developments – in Abkhazia especially – may provide momentum for increased involvement. This opportunity was overlooked in relation to the 2004 election in Abkhazia, which did little to prevent the region from becoming increasingly dependent on Russia.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Johanna Popjanevski is Deputy Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, and author of *International Law and the Post-2008 Status Quo in Georgia: Implications for Western Policies*, (Silk Road Paper, May 2011).

# RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA FIGHT THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

Stephen Blank

*During President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Tashkent on June 14, he and Uzbek President Islam Karimov indicated the need for joint approaches to deal with the common threat posed by the Arab revolutions to their rule and that of their neighbors. According to Medvedev, Russian national interest deemed it necessary "that (future) events develop along scenarios that are understandable and predictable for us". Subsequently at the Tenth Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the members expressed the need to tighten security, with President Hu Jintao of China even advocating improved measures for rapid responses to crises. Undoubtedly revolutions along these lines featured prominently in their thinking.*

**BACKGROUND:** These reactions to the Arab revolutions are the latest in a series of responses since those upheavals began in January. They have followed predictable lines whose origins were already visible in early 2011. Moscow has been concerned about the spread of these revolutions for several months. Anxiety about the Arab revolutions spreading to Central Asia was the topic of a public discussion in the Duma on April 13, 2011. Duma members and Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin urged these states to make timely reforms from above, lest they be swept away like the regimes in North Africa. Russia's goal is stability, without which these states cannot draw closer to Russia. Karasin thus recommended the top-down formation of a civil society, international and inter-religious peace, improving the population's standard of living, the development of education and work with youth.

They should thus follow the example of Russian policies to counter the specter of the 2003-2005 color revolutions and emulate what Moscow is currently doing, e.g. creating governmental "opposition parties". This essentially involves creating a Potemkin

democracy to forestall genuine reform and control political developments from above by giving governments more instruments with which to maneuver. This clearly does not suffice to ensure stability and no mention is made of economic development, freedom, or genuine political reform. Karasin's recommendations showed that Russia can only tolerate cosmetic reforms and it is doubtful that Central Asian leaders will surpass those limits even if they approach them. Indeed, none of them harkened to Moscow's recommendations.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev indeed preempted them by promulgating an instant election rather than a stage-managed referendum to give him life tenure, because that latter option was too egregious a move in the current climate. Western opposition made it clear that this referendum would incur unneeded criticism and it was equally certain that he would win any election no matter what its provenance. The election was nevertheless reported to have major shortcomings and Nazarbayev's political advisor, Yermukhamet Yertysbayev, told reporters that "I think the president is going to run the country for ten years more, and if



someone in the West doesn't like it, they'll have to get used to it."

Meanwhile, a game of balancing rival clans and factions continues while members of the inner circle, especially his daughter and son-in law, Timur Kulibayev (who are worth an estimated US\$ 2.5 billion) become targets of corruption investigations abroad. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that after his election, Nazarbayev announced his intention to strengthen the Parliament and regional governments while deconcentrating central executive power. Whatever the democratizing implications of his plan, or the ambitions for democracy Nazarbayev has, this move widens the circles of elites, dilutes the clans and factions close to him, and strengthens his hand to pick his successor while diffusing power so that nobody can amass too much power in the future.

Nazarbayev's charge to his new government is to reduce corruption although that is difficult given the corruption at the top. Second, Yertysbayev apparently envisages reforms from the top to create state-led parties of power and of opposition. This system would allegedly be a "Presidential-Parliamentary system" able to function in Nazarbayev's absence. There are rumors that Kulibayev would duly lead the opposition party, thus confirming the continuation of a kind of Potemkin democracy of the sort Karasin recommended.

While this plan has apparently infuriated the regime's opponents, they cannot stop it. Nazarbayev's concept of reform is evidently to ensure a smooth transition to his successor, whoever that will be, not to strengthen the overall system's responsiveness to society. Instead, he apparently aims to build a relatively closed but seemingly self-sustaining system of presidential-Parliamentary relationships. But

this will be a chimera in the absence of the rule of law, governmental accountability, and genuine reform. Indeed, it may lead to new authoritarianism or to sustained political strife after Nazarbayev leaves the scene. Since the succession remains unresolved and nobody can stop the ruling family's machinations to revise the constitution whenever it likes, it is doubtful that genuine democracy can be initiated from the top or that the nature of the state will change substantially as long as Nazarbayev rules and possibly for some time after that. This and other trends in Kazakhstan highlight the unresolved nature of the succession and the fact that the astute economic policies followed until now depend too much on one man's wisdom. Despite his great achievements, this is not the best augury for the future.

In other examples, Uzbekistan took control over cellular phone companies, instructing them to report on any suspicious actions by customers and on any massive distributions of text messages through their cellular lines. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have also instituted news blackouts, while Azerbaijan too has targeted Facebook and Skype. In Russia, the FSB and Ministry of Interior (MVD) reacted to the revolutions by proposing to amend the criminal code, making owners of social networks responsible for all content posted on their sites and forcing them to register with the state. The regime also has its own cadre of bloggers like those who launched cyber-strikes against Estonia in 2007 and Georgia during the 2008 war, and is clearly prepared to use force if necessary. Central Asian leaders may have drawn hope from that. As the revolutions continued they, like Karimov, sought to harmonize their approaches against them with Moscow. As one Russian official stated at the



(AFP)

recent G-8 summit in Deauville, “We support stability, not regimes”.

**CONCLUSIONS:** It seems unlikely that Central Asia will move further towards liberalization and de-concentration of power. Indeed, few analysts believe that a revolutionary wave is imminent there. Any reforms that are made will come from above to provide a minimum standard of living balanced by repression to keep the masses in line. These regimes can rely on Moscow and Beijing for support, possibly even military support given the talk of creating mechanisms for rapid response. But this also means that the underlying causes for explosion in these regimes will not be dealt with. Indeed, as compared to Kazakhstan and Russia, in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan there is not even much of an effort to advance reforms. It is nevertheless clear that struggles for power and position exist within the inner circles of these regimes. The point is that these regimes are very aware of their inherent fragility, knowing that the spread of democracy or even of reform, not to speak of revolution in any one nearby state, immediately puts them all at risk. To them there is

ultimately no difference between the spread of democracy or military defeat in their peripheries because it will amount to the same thing; the loss of their power.

We can therefore expect more resistance to U.S. calls for democratization and human rights, which have in fact been attenuated under the present Administration. It makes no sense to demand that states like Turkmenistan conform to human rights obligations when we refuse to press China or Russia, the latter being a signatory of the Helsinki treaty, to uphold their treaty commitments. Indeed, Russia and to a lesser degree China are in many ways an alibi for other Eurasian states who are merely adding to their ultimate insecurity by these practices. Consequently, to the extent that the Arab revolutions continue and possibly become more violent, and to the degree that other governments fall victim to this tide, e.g. Libya and Syria, it is likely that repressive measures directed against these democracy promotion programs will grow. This will be the case even if it seems to local rulers like pressure for reform is growing in their own countries. But by squashing demands for reform, these regimes are paradoxically ensuring that when the dam breaks it will more likely be a violent flood than a more manageable flow. It may then be too late for them, and even Moscow and Beijing acting together, to restore the broken structures.

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# KYRGYZSTAN'S FACES BLEAK PROSPECTS IN THE CUSTOMS UNION

*Bakyt Baimatov*

*In early April 2011, the Kyrgyz Government unveiled plans to join the Customs Union (CU) under the auspices of the Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC) led by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. This has sparked heated debate in Kyrgyzstan on the pros and cons of the move, which has received mixed reactions from the expert community. While the CU's economic rationality is questionable, its character as an institution designed to boost Russian influence over the CIS implies that Kyrgyzstan's membership will come at the price of reducing its political and economic sovereignty.*

**BACKGROUND:** Kyrgyzstan is a WTO member since 1998 but may opt for suspending its membership in favour of the Customs Union. However, entering the CU will increase tariff rates for other WTO partners in conflict with WTO tariff regulations. Kyrgyzstan will be required to spell out new customs and tariff regulations with each WTO member and refund compensation costs for changing tariff rates. According to current estimates, compensation costs may reach US\$ 1 billion. This will put greater strains on the chronically underfinanced Kyrgyz budget. Further, should this scenario materialise, Kyrgyzstan will be stripped of its Most Favoured Nation (MFN) trade status and other trade preferences with 153 WTO members.

Joining the CU is fraught with other risks as well. The grand total trade turnover between Kyrgyzstan and the WTO amounted to 48 percent in 2010, whereas CU members account for 1.9 percent. This may disproportionately affect the distribution of customs revenues between the CU and Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, the current average rate of the common external customs tariff levied by the CU is 10.6 percent. As a WTO member, Kyrgyzstan enjoys 5.1 percent of the average customs tariff.

The repercussions of the possible entry are still far from clear. Economically, joining the CU will inevitably result in price hikes in the domestic market for a majority of goods and commodities imported from CU members. Re-export transactions from China to Russia and Kazakhstan make up 60 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP, according to the Kyrgyz Government. The CU customs tariffs are estimated to be three times higher for a cheap Kyrgyz re-export if the country chooses not to join the CU.

It is also feared that the competitiveness of local manufacturers will be severely hamstrung if the market is flooded with Russian products. Further, EURASEC countries differ disproportionately on a wide range of macroeconomic indicators, resource base and competitive advantages. As of 2008, Kyrgyzstan's GDP stood at US\$ 5 billion whereas Russia's GDP reached US\$ 1676.6 billion, with Kazakhstan at US\$ 135.6 and Belarus at US\$ 60.3 respectively. Given its growing budget deficit, its total reliance on re-export operations and virtually non-existent industry, Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest Central Asian countries and lags far behind the CU states, which provide a grand total 83 percent of the Eurasian Economic Space (EES) economic output. On this negative backdrop,

the economic viability of Kyrgyzstan's entry to the CU now seems uncertain.

**IMPLICATIONS:** From a political standpoint, Kyrgyzstan runs a risk of falling under tighter Russian control if it joins the CU. Decision-making power in the CU is based on the level of economic power of its members and not on consensus. Thus, the overwhelming decision-making power rests with Russia as a leading economy and energy provider in the post Soviet area. In particular, Russia may be tempted to make use of its dominant position in the CU and increase its pressure on the Kyrgyz leadership to close the U.S. air base at Manas airport or demand 48 percent of the shares in the Dastan torpedo making plant.

Russia's ban on Georgian goods and attempts to cajole Ukraine from entering the EU Free Trade Zone in favour of the CU using gas and tariff manipulations indicates that Russia will not allow Kyrgyzstan a free ride. Russia's hard line policies of economic nationalism towards Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus leave little leeway for manoeuvre. Kyrgyzstan is highly dependent on fuel imports from Russia, which provides the Kremlin with ample opportunities to exert economic and political pressure on the country. In 2010, Russia doubled fuel export duties for Kyrgyzstan when former President Kurmanbek Bakiev, in breach of earlier promises to Moscow, extended the leasing terms for the U.S. air base at Manas. Soaring fuel prices exacerbated economic woes at home and sparked protests that played a prominent part in Bakiev's fall. Given its continuous macroeconomic and political uncertainty, Kyrgyzstan is easy prey for pressure and influence from other CU members. In a desperate attempt to alleviate its severe budget deficit, Kyrgyzstan has applied for a US\$ 106.7 million loan from the EURASEC Anti-Crisis

Fund. With Russia as a key donor, a disbursement of the requested loan now appears to be a clear cut political conditionality including quotas for Kyrgyz labour migrants, along with military and technical assistance.

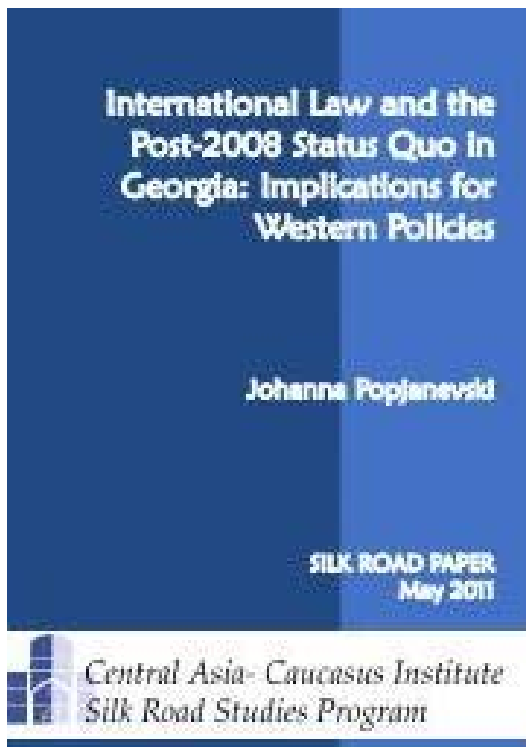
At the same time, the CU itself faces a number of formidable problems that may thwart its integration efforts and subvert the foundations of the EES and EURASEC. Ironically, Russia and Kazakhstan aspire to enter the WTO, making integration within the CU all but pointless. Interpersonal relations between the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus play a paramount role and may ultimately decide the CU's success or failure. In this sense, it is a major problem for the CU that the relations between Russia and Belarus have deteriorated as demonstrated by the "tariff wars" over dairy and oil imports in the past year. Belarus will announce its final decision on the target dates of joining the CU only by mid-July this year. Minsk opposes certain conditions of the free trade regime under the CU, particularly tariff rates. Belarussian President Lukashenko's highly unpredictable governing style was clearly demonstrated in his recent remarks where he blasted the Russian leadership for its criticism of the presidential elections and crackdown on opposition in Belarus. In particular, he was quoted as saying that his country expects to have access to "all energy pipelines" as a member of the EES. "Otherwise, the Eurasian Economic Space is hardly needed", he warned. This means that Belarus wants to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and seek alternative and less costly energy routes bypassing Russia. Russia recently doubled the oil prices and export duties for Belarus in what many see as a way of pressuring Minsk to curtail its rapprochement with the West.

Likewise, Kazakhstan eyes lucrative energy infrastructure investments in Georgia which are met with growing exasperation from Moscow. Although Russia has no objections to Tajikistan entering the CU, Moscow nonetheless has recently increased the fuel export tariffs to the country by 44 percent, causing an energy deficit and sharp price hikes in Tajikistan.

**CONCLUSIONS:** These developments demonstrate that the CU is a fluid political union of actors with conflicting interests, grievances and priorities rather than a sustainable economic organization. It remains to be seen whether the CU proves a viable institution for economic integration and not merely a Russian tool for pressuring Belarus,

which displays little enthusiasm to join the Russia-backed Union State, as well as Georgia and Ukraine who seek economic integration with the EU. The aforementioned considerations imply that the CU is a politically motivated rather than economically justified institution. For Kyrgyzstan, joining the CU may imply a high cost in terms of its political and economic sovereignty.

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New Silk Road Paper:

*International Law and the Post-2008 Status Quo in Georgia: Implications for Western Politics*

**By Johanna Popjanevski**

This Silk Road Paper analyzes the international legal situation in the aftermath of the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, and provides recommendations for Western policy toward Georgia and its breakaway regions.

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## TAJIK AUTHORITIES IMPOSE HEAVIER RESTRICTIONS ON ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Alexander Sodiqov

*With little discussion, Tajikistan's parliament recently approved a number of government-proposed amendments to legislation. These amendments impose additional restrictions on religious education for Tajik nationals both at home and abroad. Young Tajiks seeking to study Islam abroad will now find it increasingly difficult or impossible to do so, and their options for studying religion at home will be limited to a few government-sanctioned schools. As a result, people wishing to learn more about the religion will have little other choice but to seek such education from clandestine groups.*

**BACKGROUND:** On May 25, the lower chamber of Tajikistan's parliament approved changes to the 2009 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, most commonly known as the "Religion Law". The changes introduce two mandatory requirements for Tajik citizens wishing to study religion abroad. The first requirement is to graduate from a similar level school offering religious education within Tajikistan. The second prerequisite is permission from the country's Ministry of Education and Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA). These restrictions effectively bar young Tajiks from foreign Islamic schools because few people in the country would be able to meet both requirements.

Explaining the reasoning behind regulating religious schooling abroad Davlatali Davlatzoda, a parliamentarian for the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDPT), suggested that over 90 percent of the country's Muslims are Sunnis of the Hanafi school of Islam, but some Tajiks have been taught the religion by other currents of Islam in foreign countries. He warned that this could lead to conflicts over the interpretation of Islam. According to the parliamentarian, the latest changes to the Religion Law would enable the authorities to

regulate which countries individuals would go to and what they would study there.

The amended legislation reinforces previous restrictions on foreign religious education. In August 2010, President Emomali Rahmon initiated a massive campaign to bring back hundreds of Tajik students from madrasahs (Islamic schools) abroad. Rahmon then argued that foreign madrasahs were teaching young people to become "extremists and terrorists", and that all Tajiks had to return from such schools. The campaign has prompted over 1,500 students to return to Tajikistan. Still, according to the CRA, about 500 Tajiks continue studying in foreign Islamic schools in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, and Syria. Moreover, many of those who came back from foreign madrasahs were not able to find jobs or continue their education in Tajikistan and chose to leave the country again.

While introducing legal restraints on religious education abroad, the authorities are also seeking to more closely regulate Islamic schooling at home. On June 15, the parliament's lower house approved a number of amendments to the country's Criminal Code. These amendments introduce harsh penalties for "religious extremist" teaching, making the organization of "religious study groups of



extremist nature” punishable by 8-12 years in prison. Participants in such groups could face up to eight years in jail.

Tajikistan’s Minister of Internal Affairs Abdurahim Qahhorov, who presented the amendments in the parliament, suggested that harsh measures were needed to prevent religious leaders with an “extremist” agenda from promoting intolerance and radical versions of Islam in the country. There is no clarity at the moment who will decide whether any religious teaching is “extremist” or not. The legislation in its present form seems to leave this judgment to prosecutors, enabling them to punish organizers of any unsanctioned activity which involves elements of religious instruction.

The enactment of this legislation serves to further suppress Islamic education opportunities outside of state control. A ban on religious teaching without a government-issued license is vigorously enforced in Tajikistan. In 2010, Tajik police carried out a nationwide campaign against “illegal madrasahs”, shutting down hundreds of informal study groups,

where children learnt the basics of Islam. Since the beginning of this year, police has closed down at least 60 unapproved “Islamic study groups” in the country.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The new restrictions on religious education demonstrate that the Tajik authorities are determined to strictly regulate who teaches the country’s children and

young people about Islam. The purpose of the legislation is to help achieve this by limiting the right to teach religion to a few government-licensed institutions within the country. The authorities rely on these institutions in promoting a “traditional” or “official” version of Islam, which can help prevent “extremist” religious ideologies capable of circumventing the state.

However, it is very unlikely that the persecution of unsanctioned Islamic study groups would help the authorities strengthen the role of traditional Islam vis-à-vis its more radical manifestations. On the contrary, these repressive measures might increase the influence of clandestine Islamic groups. The existing government-approved schools offering religious education cannot meet the growing popular demand for Islamic learning. The country now has an Islamic Institute, where about 1,500 students receive higher religious education. In addition, some 6,000 students attend 19 madrasahs and three mixed schools, where Islam is taught alongside secular subjects, all at the secondary education level.

These institutions are obviously too few for Tajikistan's over seven million Muslims, most of whom are young and eager to learn more about Islam. Besides, these institutions are mostly based in urban centers, while the majority of the country's population lives in rural areas.

It is unlikely that the government will be able or willing to open many more Islamic schools and thus satisfy the rising demand for religious knowledge in the country. Instead, the authorities have chosen to rely on mosques in teaching the basics of Islam to school-age children. In June, it was announced that the CRA, Islamic Institute and Islamic Centre were working jointly with the country's education authorities to develop a curriculum for a course in Islam which would be taught to children over the age of seven at all major mosques during the summer school break. Some mosques have already launched such courses.

It remains unclear whether mosque-based summer classes would help reducing the demand for religious education. Besides, the enrollment of children in such courses is expected to become illegal when the parental responsibility bill, which was approved by the lower chamber of Tajikistan's parliament on June 15, becomes law. The bill bans children under the age of 18 from "participating in the activities of religious organizations", which includes all places of worship, except during religious holidays. The legislation has yet to be approved by the upper house and signed by the president to become a law, but this is seen only as a formality. When the law takes effect, parents will be responsible for not allowing

their children to participate in any activities organized in mosques.

Hence, it is unlikely that the government would be able to offer the country's young people viable opportunities to study Islam beyond two dozen licensed institutions. The limited opportunities for Islamic education through approved schools will inevitably cause an increasing number of people to seek such education from individuals and groups which operate outside of state control. This will ultimately increase the ideological influence of underground Islamic groups, thus leading to exactly what the government-imposed restrictions on religious education aim to prevent.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The government-initiated legislative changes seeking to regulate where young Tajiks can study Islam and who can teach it are unlikely to help ward off "extremist" Islam. While interest in Islam is steadily growing in Tajikistan, the country does not have enough institutions to offer "official" religious education. An attempt to involve mosques in educating children about the religion clearly conflicts with the recently imposed ban on children attending places of worship. Thus, the amendments limit the options available to Tajik nationals for studying the religion while not filling the ensuing Islamic education deficit. This creates an ideal breeding ground for clandestine Islamic study groups, thus defeating the very purpose of the government-imposed amendments.

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## FIELD REPORTS

### COMPETITION FOR CASPIAN GAS TRANSIT INTENSIFIES

*Mina Muradova*

Competition between the West and Russia for the transport of Caspian gas to the European market is increasing. As the time approaches for Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan to decide to whom their natural gas will be sold and which routes will be used to bring gas to Europe, the struggle for gas reserves intensifies.

The EU has forecasted gas demand in Europe until 2030 to between 370 and nearly 600 billion cubic metres (bcm). EU Commissioner for Energy Günther Oettinger has said: "What is common ... to all these scenarios, is that the imports from third countries will increase until 2030 or 2035 due to the depletion of the EU's own reserves..." If the current gas imports from Russia cover around 25 percent of the European gas consumption, Russia could in 2030 export over 150 bcm of gas to the EU.

While admitting the importance of gas imports from the Russian Federation, the EU makes no secret of the fact that it wants alternative gas suppliers. Several potential supplier countries for gas supply exist, such as Azerbaijan, Iraq and Turkmenistan, as well as Gulf states. "We support some projects more than others, that is clear. In this regard, I reaffirm again: the EU wants direct contacts with Caspian producers through new supply routes and pipelines", the EU Commissioner for Energy noted.

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are being considered as key potential gas suppliers for the EU-backed Nabucco pipeline project. The € 7.9 billion Nabucco pipeline aims to bring up to 31 bcm of gas annually

from the Caspian and Middle East to an Austrian hub via Turkey and the Balkans.

The Obama administration has expressed strong support to the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) to bring natural gas from the Caspian region to Europe.

"From the standpoint of U.S. policy goals, the best outcome is one that brings the most gas, soonest and most reliably, to those parts of Europe that need it most", Richard Morningstar, U.S. energy envoy for the Eurasian region, told a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on June 2. He highlighted that a key element of U.S. foreign policy is helping Europe attain energy security to keep Europe economically strong, as well as helping Caspian countries to find new routes to markets for their hydrocarbons. Morningstar stated that within the SGC, three pipeline consortia – the Nabucco, ITGI and TAP – are laying the financial, technical and organizational groundwork to compete for the right to ship gas from Shah Deniz II to Europe. The investment decisions to make that possible should be made by the end of this year, Morningstar said.

On June 6, Morningstar told reporters in Baku that the U.S. considers the Nabucco pipeline "the most preferable" option from a political and strategic standpoint. "The question is whether the Nabucco pipeline is commercially viable", he said. "The basic issue is that if that pipeline is completed in 2017, will there be enough gas available that makes it viable at that point?". He said members of the Nabucco consortium as well as gas producing countries

needed to make a decision on the pipeline “in the coming months”.

He also expressed hopes that Azerbaijan and Turkey will sign a transit agreement for new gas from the Shah Deniz field in the coming weeks. Azerbaijan is negotiating with Turkey to sell 6 bcm of gas per year from the second phase of the giant Shah Deniz gas field in Azerbaijan, and to ship 10 bcm to European customers via Turkey. Talks include issues related to transit fees, volumes of gas as well as transportation options, but do not specify which pipeline would carry the gas. The Shah Deniz field is estimated to contain 1.2 trillion cubic metres of gas. Production began in 2006, and the second phase is expected to start by 2017. “My understanding from all of the parties is that an agreement is very close”, Morningstar said, “We see no reason why the agreement should not be signed ... in the next several weeks”.

Officials of Azerbaijan’s State Oil Company predict that a transit agreement for new gas from the Shah Deniz field may be signed by September-October. “By 2017 we will definitely have 10 bcm of gas, which we have been talking about earlier”, SOCAR's deputy vice-president Vitaliy Baylarbayov said. It is expected that Azerbaijan's gas production will increase to 50-55 bcm by 2025.

Meanwhile, the West strongly encourages Ashgabad to join the SGC through the construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. At the Turkmen Oil and Gas Conference on May 26, Daniel Stein, a Senior Advisor in Morningstar's office, said that “the United States notes with interest that President Berdimuhammedov has talked positively about providing gas to Europe through a Trans-Caspian Pipeline as part of Turkmenistan’s efforts to diversify its export routes”.

“While the ultimate decision is of course up to the Government of Turkmenistan, we would welcome Turkmenistan’s participation in the Southern Corridor”, he noted.

Earlier, official Ashgabad announced that Turkmenistan was prepared to make some 40 bcm of gas available for Nabucco, the strongest commitment Turkmenistan has made so far toward joining the project as a supplier.

However, with reference to the Caspian Sea convention, both Russia and Iran believe that before the construction of a Trans-Caspian pipeline, all five littoral states need to agree on environmental issues. “Russia, as a Caspian country, is against the laying of pipelines and gas lines along the bed of this unique body of water, which could harm the ecological state of the Caspian”, Ambassador Vladimir Dorokhin, Russia's envoy to Baku, said at a press conference on June 8. But Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan believe that only countries directly involved in pipelines on their immediate territories should decide these matters.

According to Baylarbayov, talks on building the Trans-Caspian pipeline will take place without Russia, ANS TV reported. He believed Russia will not hinder such talks and added that an environmental impact study needs to be conducted, along with a technical and economic feasibility study, without which a decision will not be made.

U.S. Ambassador Matthew Bryza also said that talk of environmental threats is “illogical” and added that the U.S. will help Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan protect their energy resources from “developments posing potential unforeseen risks” but did not go into details on this

## CONTENTIOUS AGREEMENT ON ELECTORAL REFORM REACHED IN GEORGIA

*Maka Gurgidze*

On June 27, Georgia's ruling National Movement party and several opposition parties signed an agreement on electoral system reform. The deal determining provisions for amendments to the Electoral Code was hailed by the authorities but rejected by six opposition parties claiming that it offers only "façade changes" and does not address fundamental electoral shortfalls. Three local election watchdog groups also criticized the deal and expressed concerns over inbuilt legal controversies.

The electoral reform talks started in November 2010, and aimed to reconcile key proposals from Georgia's political forces in a negotiating format known as the Election Code Working Group (ECWG). The program for improving the environment for free and fair elections was negotiated between the ruling National Movement and the opposition Group of Eight consisting of the New Rights Party, Christian Democratic Movement, National Forum, Conservative Party, Republican Party, People's Party, and Our Georgia Free Democrats, which agreed to speak in one voice on election related-issues. In March, however, the talks went into a deadlock and were resumed two months later outside the ECWG format, and the authorities suggested that consultations would be carried out with each party individually. The renewed format enabled the National Movement to reconcile its own vision with the New Rights Party and Christian Democratic Movement. The final agreement achieved between them and other opposition parties will define the amendments to Electoral Code, which should be passed the coming fall.

The first change suggested by the electoral system reform agreement increases the number of seats in parliament. It stipulates that the number of lawmakers will rise from the current 150 to 190 MPs, of which 107 will be elected by a party list proportional system and the remaining 83 seats will

be taken by majoritarians. The majoritarian mandates will increase through the creation of ten new constituencies by dividing current ones containing more than 100,000 registered voters. Five election districts in Tbilisi and larger towns throughout Georgia – Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, and Batumi – fall into this category.

Another set of changes entail setting up funding rules for political parties. Each party clearing the 5 percent threshold will obtain GEL 1 million from the state budget to cover electoral campaign costs. Also, individuals and companies will be allowed to donate twice as much to parties.

The agreement also includes new arrangements regarding the accuracy of voter lists. It envisages the formation of a special commission composed of representatives of the ruling and opposition parties as well as civil society to ensure that voter lists are reliable. In addition, the deal involves media monitoring of campaigns, sets an extended deadline for electoral complaints and creates a governmental interagency task force in charge of preventing the use of administrative resources by the authorities.

While the document shares some of the proposals outlined by the Group of Eight, it does not incorporate its central issues. The coalition made an effort to introduce a mechanism by which a party's overall votes in Parliament will equal the votes a party obtains in sum through proportional and majoritarian elections. For example, in the 2008 Parliamentary election, the National Movement received 59.18 percent by proportional representation. Nevertheless, its share of seats in Parliament amounted to 79.3 percent because apart from its proportional seats it won 71 more seats through majoritarian elections. Through the proposed mechanism, the Group of Eight tried to prevent a similar scenario in the 2012 Parliamentary elections, but the ruling party rejected the proposal.

Another proposal not included in the deal is a 50 percent threshold for the majoritarian MP candidates to be declared winners in the first round. Increasing the threshold from the current 30 percent to 50 percent would increase the chances for a runoff where opposition forces could unify around the most successful opposition candidate against the ruling party's candidate.

The Group of Eight has insisted on introducing biometric technology to identify voters on Election Day. The authorities rejected the proposal claiming that the process of introducing such technology would be costly and not realistic in the upcoming elections.

Despite the fact that the key issues proposed by the Group of Eight were not adopted by the authorities, two members of the coalition – the New Rights Party and Christian Democratic Movement – signed the electoral system reform deal sponsored by the ruling party. They argued that rejecting the authorities' proposal would deprive them of the small concessions the National Movement eventually made. The six opposition parties refusing to sign the agreement, however, insist that these concessions only imply a superficial shift of the electoral environment and that if the Group of

Eight would stay united, it could force the authorities to further compromise. "We continue the struggle for fair elections and changing the government through elections", the six opposition parties stated when the deal was signed.

Apart from being politically contentious, the deal has also raised legal controversies. According to three local election watchdog groups, the increased number of MPs suggested by the agreement violates the decision of the 2003 referendum to downsize the Parliament from 235 to 150 MPs.

In sum, the political process aiming to refine the electoral environment has demonstrated the opposition's inability to unite in urging the authorities to adopt the pivotal suggestions they have put forward. In this sense, the proposal ensuring a balance of power among political forces would have challenged the ruling party's anticipated domination in the 2012 Parliament and prepare the ground for a peaceful change of government. The opposition's deficiency was deftly played by the authorities who, along with its partners in the electoral reform agreement, are currently preparing a draft of amendments to the Election Code which will be passed to the Venice Commission for legal expertise.

## KAZAKHSTAN PRAISES ENHANCED COOPERATION BETWEEN MUSLIM COUNTRIES

*Georgiy Voloshin*

On June 28, Kazakhstan took over the chairmanship of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) from Tajikistan at a meeting of OIC foreign ministers in Astana. This 57-member state organization assembled representatives from 11 observer countries, the UN, the OSCE, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization as well as high-level delegations from the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia, China and others. One of the first steps taken by the new chairman was to

propose renaming the Organization, which has become the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

In his welcoming address to the meeting's participants, President Nursultan Nazarbayev outlined a number of suggestions aimed at strengthening the OIC's capacity for coordinated action in various areas of interest, ranging from agricultural and technological cooperation to joint economic governance. Kazakhstan's leader proposed to set up a Regional Fund for Food Security modeled

after the UN FAO based in Rome. This new entity, to be headquartered in Astana, would be in charge of providing food assistance to OIC member countries affected by poor harvests, droughts and negative economic conditions. Another proposal formulated by the Kazakh President was to adopt an Action Plan for innovative and technological cooperation, the future implementation of which would be entrusted to the International Innovative Fund.

According to Nazarbayev, by 2030 OIC member states will be home to more than 2.2 billion people and house considerable productive capacities. This explains why their leaders are entitled to start playing a more important role in world economic affairs, namely via participation in G20 regular meetings. A relevant suggestion will be laid down in a letter addressed to the G20 Secretariat. A new way to enhance the OIC's visibility and to promote the common values of its member states could be, as envisioned by Nazarbayev, to create the web-based platform e-ISLAM which might provide, in a comprehensive and affordable manner, all the necessary information about the Muslim religion and OIC-sponsored activities on religious issues.

A large chunk of Nazarbayev's speech was dedicated to the necessity of overcoming the syndrome of suspiciousness towards Muslims presented by some Western scholars as fervent antagonists of the West. The concept of the "clash of civilizations", first put forward by Samuel Huntington in 1992, needs to be replaced with a piece of fresh thinking on how to build an "alliance of civilizations" through an open and straightforward dialogue between the Muslim and Christian worlds. Nazarbayev reminded his listeners that in 2008 Astana hosted a Meeting of foreign ministers from Muslim and Western countries, with the aim to discuss the global agenda of peaceful coexistence between different religions and civilizations. Kazakhstan's leader later invited the OIC Meeting's participants to attend the Fourth Congress of world and traditional religions, which will take place in Astana next year.

The security dimension of the OIC is also expected to be strengthened. President Nazarbayev could not

help mentioning Afghanistan, where his country's commitments have recently been overturned by the no-vote of the Kazakh Senate rejecting a bill about providing limited military assistance to the ISAF contingent in Kabul. In a move to reassure his NATO allies about Kazakhstan's readiness to continue to aid Afghanistan, be it on a bilateral or multilateral basis, Nazarbayev hinted at the possibility of creating a special working group in charge of Afghanistan's rehabilitation. Another idea that surfaced at the Meeting was to launch official works towards the establishment of a nuclear-free area in the Middle East, with the possibility of its further extension to the whole world. Kazakhstan's President also mentioned the need for OIC members to become engaged in a stronger cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism. This message was indirectly addressed to the representatives of two military blocs – the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which are considered the main shields against state-sponsored violence in Central Asia.

As far as economic cooperation is concerned, an Action Plan for Cooperation with Central Asia was solemnly adopted. This framework program is mainly focused on agriculture, transport and market access and is closely interlinked with the 2005 Ten-Year Program of Action approved at the Makkah Extraordinary Islamic Summit. The purpose of these two multilateral instruments will now be to promote intra-OIC trade up to the level of 20 percent. According to President Nazarbayev, the development of a regional financial center in Almaty will only serve the achievement of the OIC common objectives, as new patterns of banking activities based on Islamic finance are rapidly taking ground in Kazakhstan's "southern capital".

In his final words, President Nazarbayev called on all the OIC member states to support Kazakhstan's candidacy to the EXPO 2017 competition which will be organized under the topic of sustainable energy and new ways of energy generation for the future.

## KAZAN MEETING FAILS TO RESOLVE NAGORNO-KARABAKH

*Haroutiun Khachatryan*

The failure of the Armenian-Azerbaijani summit in Kazan on June 24 to reach a compromise on the principles of settlement in Nagorno-Karabakh showed that the influence of great powers in the South Caucasus region is weakening. The three countries co-chairing the OSCE Minsk Group, Russia, the U.S. and France, have previously acted as neutral brokers assisting the parties to the conflict in finding a peaceful solution. While their interests in the South Caucasus differ, they have shared a concern to inhibit a destabilization of the region which could lead to resumed hostilities.

The standpoints of the three countries were coordinated through actions and statements by their representatives serving as cochairmen of the Minsk Group. This work has continued since 1998 except for several months in 2008 when the U.S. and France sought to isolate Russia after its war with Georgia. During this 13 year period the mediating activities undertaken by either one of the three co-chairs enjoyed the full support, at least officially, of the other two. The U.S. organized a meeting in Key West in 2001, and France in Rambouillet in 2006. During the last three years, the Russian President Medvedev has taken on a more active mediating role.

In recent years, the co-chairs have become increasingly active in their efforts to reach a breakthrough in settling the conflict. This transition from a neutral role to an active one is largely driven by a common urge to guarantee stability in a region which is, for different reasons, significant for all three countries and for which the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains a major factor of potential destabilization. This line of the co-chair countries can be traced from the Field Assessment Mission of the co-chairmen carried out in the occupied territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh on October 7-13, 2010, which produced a statement claiming that the status-quo can no longer be

tolerated. The Deauville statement of the three co-chair countries' Presidents on May 26 repeated this claim and demonstrated their wish to reach real progress in the volatile region. The co-chairs understood that even if some progress was made in Kazan, a final solution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh would be years away.

Besides the Deauville statement, different kinds of pressure were exerted on the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan. First of all, this entailed an unprecedented media campaign predicting success in Kazan. Before the meeting, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan were invited for talks to Washington and Moscow. Finally, on the day before the meeting, President Obama made separate phone calls to Presidents Sargsyan and Aliyev and urged them to reach some progress in Kazan. French President Sarkozy sent them messages containing the same demand. In addition, the meeting in Kazan was mediated by Russian President Medvedev.

Yet, no progress was achieved during the Kazan meeting, and Armenia and Azerbaijan blame each other for the failure and make conflicting statements.

The region remains in a dangerous deadlock, with renewed warfare as a definite possibility. The positions of the three great powers, which are at the same time permanent members of the UN Security Council, in the region are weakening. In this situation, Armenia is seeking to approach Europe as seen in Serzh Sargsyan's speech to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on June 22.

After the failure at the Kazan meeting, the three co-chair countries will likely move to different tactics and use leverages belonging to a separate country, which may prove more effective than joint efforts. Another possibility is an increased engagement by the EU in the region.

## NEWS DIGEST

### **KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT LEADER CHARGED WITH MORE SERIOUS CRIMES**

**22 June**

The Kyrgyz Prosecutor-General's Office says the charges against the leader of the Ata-Jurt (Fatherland) party in parliament have been increased, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Kamchybek Tashiev was questioned by the Prosecutor-General's Investigative Directorate on June 20 regarding his alleged beating of fellow deputy Bakhadyr Suleimanov. Suleimanov filed a lawsuit against Tashiev on April 1, accusing him of assault and battery. Suleimanov spent several days at the cardiology center in Bishkek after the alleged fight and later also in a hospital. Tashiev said he never physically assaulted Suleimanov, but admits they had a heated conversation and verbally insulted each other on April 1. He has not said what they argued about. Originally, Tashiev was charged with hooliganism and battery. But medical experts say Suleimanov's health was seriously damaged after the alleged beating by Tashiev. The Prosecutor-General's Office said the charges against Tashiev had been changed to "premeditated infliction of significant damage to a person's health." Tashiev -- who was a cabinet minister under ousted President Kurmanbek Bakiev -- could face up to eight years in prison if found guilty of the charges. Tashiev told RFE/RL on June 15 that the hooliganism charges brought against him were an attempt "to prevent my participation in the presidential election" scheduled for the fall. Many experts and other politicians think Tashiev is planning to run for president. Ata-Jurt is a member of Kyrgyzstan's three-party governing coalition. Its members include many former ministers and deputies who were loyal to Bakiev. (RFE/RL)

### **SHOOTING DEATHS REPORTEDLY RISE ON UZBEK-KYRGYZ BORDER**

**23 June**

Uzbek border guards have shot dead at least 13 people who were crossing into Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstan's southern Batken region in the past two months, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Uzbek officials told RFE/RL that security services are only firing on people who illegally cross the border and

smugglers who disregard orders from border guards. Khurshidbek Tursunov, deputy head of the Ferghana district, told RFE/RL that the people crossing the border were the ones who should be blamed for the deadly incidents, not the border guards. "We have repeatedly explained that bypassing the border checkpoints or smuggling goods is banned," Tursunov said. Security along the border was stepped up almost two months ago, when the number of deadly shootings increased. The incidents involving shooting deaths occurred in at least four villages close to the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border: Chimyon, Halmiyon, Mindon, and Vodil. Muzaffar Shodmonov, 22, was shot dead and two of his companions wounded last week as they were bringing goods over the border from a nearby bazaar in Kyrgyzstan. His father, Sharof Shodmonov, told RFE/RL that his son's business was to bring foodstuffs and other consumer goods to local bazaars in Uzbekistan. Shodmonov said that the security services were themselves involved in smuggling and were in effect protecting their monopoly rather than the border. For years people along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek have engaged in cross-border trade despite the government's efforts to curtail uncontrolled trade. The Uzbek government imposes high customs fees for imported goods, which traders believe makes them too expensive for local consumers and leads many people to avoid the border checkpoints. Analysts say that under the pretext of protecting the domestic market and curtailing illegal imports, the trade in goods in Uzbekistan has become centralized and is controlled by criminal groups. The Abu-Sahiy company, which is allegedly controlled by President Islam Karimov's youngest daughter, Lola Karimova, is one of the biggest importers of consumer goods from China to Uzbekistan. (RFE/RL)

### **ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN SUMMIT FALLS SHORT OF BREAKTHROUGH**

**24 June**

Armenia and Azerbaijan reported progress Friday at a summit hosted by Russia but fell short of a breakthrough in a territorial row that world powers fear could erupt into armed conflict. "The heads of state noted the reaching of mutual understanding on

a number of questions, whose resolution helps create conditions to approve the basic principles," the leaders said in a statement published by the Kremlin. The two sides have faced international pressure to sign up to a "basic principles" agreement on the Nagorny Karabakh conflict zone, but apparently did not manage to agree terms at the summit in the Russian Volga city of Kazan. The leaders were shown sitting around a table and smiling for cameras on Russian television, which did not broadcast their remarks. The meeting supervised by Russia President Dmitry Medvedev had sparked optimism that Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev might achieve the first major progress in many years of fruitless talks. The two sides still exchange deadly fire around the Nagorny Karabakh conflict zone, 17 years after fighting a war over the now Armenian separatist-controlled region in western Azerbaijan. The Russian foreign ministry had said in a statement that the meeting, held behind closed doors, was "expected to play a decisive role in the Nagorny Karabakh peace process." Moscow added that the document Medvedev hoped to get the two enemies to sign at the meeting was designed to pave the way for "a comprehensive peace agreement" to be sealed at a later date. In the statement released after the summit, the leaders expressed "gratitude" to the leaders of Russia, the United States and France for their "constant attention to the problem of regulating Nagorny Karabakh." They also said they "highly rated the personal efforts of the Russian president to help reach agreements." But they failed to meet international pressure, expressed in recent days, that they would sign up to a "basic principles" agreement. US President Barack Obama on Thursday had called the two presidents and urged them to sign the document, the White House said, while French leader Nicolas Sarkozy sent a letter calling for the agreement to be finalised. "There are moments in history when the leadership of a country should demonstrate to its people courage, wisdom and the road toward peace," Sarkozy said in the letter released by the Armenian presidency. (AFP)

#### **AFGHAN FORCES CAPTURE BURQA WEARING LEADER**

**28 June**

Security forces in Afghanistan have apprehended a senior leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and two associates, a military

spokesman said Tuesday. The spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force said the Uzbek leader attempted to avoid capture by wearing a burqa in an attempt to disguise himself as a Muslim woman. He is suspected of facilitating suicide bomb attacks for the Taliban in addition to planning attacks against the Afghan police and security forces, the spokesman said. The leader and his associates were captured in Kunduz province Monday by a combined Afghan and coalition security force. (UPI)

#### **BAKU GOOD FOR ENERGY SECURITY, U.S. SAYS**

**29 June**

It makes strategic sense for the U.S. allies in the European Union to get some of their natural gas from the Caspian region, the U.S. envoy to Azerbaijan said. Azerbaijan holds more than 50 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in its Shah Deniz gas field in the Caspian Sea. Azeri gas is viewed by Europe as a supply source for its lauded Nabucco natural gas pipeline, a project included in the so-called Southern Corridor of transit networks meant to break Russia's grip on the European energy sector. Matthew Bryza, U.S. envoy to Baku, told the regional Trend news agency Washington and its European allies felt gas from the Caspian region would help allay some regional energy security concerns. "Of course, it doesn't make sense for all of that gas to come eastwards, but some of it," Bryza was quoted as saying. "Some of it is just situated in deposits in the Caspian Sea or near the Caspian Sea for which the most economical mode of export is across the Caspian Sea." Baku is at the center of a regional energy race spurred by 2009 disputes between Russia and Ukraine, which hosts 80 percent of the Russian natural gas sent to European consumers. (UPI)

#### **KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT SETS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION FOR OCTOBER 30**

**30 June**

Kyrgyzstan's parliament today set October 30 as the date for a presidential election designed to move the country closer to completing constitutional reforms aimed at creating Central Asia's first parliamentary democracy. The mandate of current President Roza Otunbaeva is due to expire on December 31. She has run the country since April 2010, when President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was toppled by a violent revolt. (RFE/RL)



## **ETHNIC UZBEKS PUSH FOR SWITCH TO KYRGYZ LANGUAGE SCHOOLS**

**1 July**

Several prominent members of the ethnic Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan's southern city of Osh have proposed gradually switching to Kyrgyz as the language of instruction in schools, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Osh City Council member Amanullo Iminov, an ethnic Uzbek, told RFE/RL he advocates launching Kyrgyz language classes in schools dominated by ethnic Uzbeks and increasing the teaching hours in Kyrgyz in high schools. He said the proposal will be considered at the next City Council session. Uzbek playwright and journalist Erkin Baynazarov told RFE/RL that the initiative is long overdue. He added he and about 50 other people are holding meetings with the public and lobbying to have only Uzbek language and literature classes taught in Uzbek, and all other classes in Kyrgyz. Independent expert Abdumomun Mamaraimov told RFE/RL he thinks the switch from Uzbek to Kyrgyz as the language of instruction may compound ethnic tensions, and some parents might consider it discrimination. School principal Kadyrzhan Yunusov told RFE/RL that his school in the village of Kashgar switched in 2009 to teaching all subjects in Kyrgyz. He said parents had suggested the change due to a lack of Uzbek-language textbooks. Ar-Namys party member Anvar Artykov told RFE/RL that the initiative could facilitate greater integration after the June 2010 clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks that left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. (RFE/RL)

## **FRENCH WEBSITE CLEARED OF LIBEL ACCUSATIONS BROUGHT UZBEKISTAN PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER**

**1 July**

A Paris court cleared a French website of defamation charges Friday after it called the daughter of Uzbek President Islam Karimov "the daughter of a dictator," the site said in a statement. French news website Rue89.com said the court ruled that the site hadn't personally attacked Lola Karimova, but was legitimately criticizing Uzbekistan's authoritarian government. Karimova had reportedly sought €30,000 (\$43,500) in damages over an article that accused her of seeking to whitewash the Central Asian nation's much-criticized rights record. Karimov has led Uzbekistan with an iron fist since the 1980s, when it still formed part of the Soviet Union. The ruling couldn't be

immediately confirmed with the court. But the ruling was also reported on by Reporters Without Borders, Radio Free Europe and an Uzbek opposition site that has covered the trial very closely. Uzbekistan was described in the most recent Human Rights Watch country report as having an "abysmal human rights record." In an article published in May 2010, Rue89 described Karimova's involvement in an AIDS charity gala event as an attempt to "whitewash the image of Uzbekistan." The article labeled Karimova a hypocrite for attending an AIDS awareness event while those working to stem the disease in Uzbekistan serve prison sentences for promoting condom use and disposable needles. Health activist Maxim Popov was sentenced in 2009 to seven years in jail for "corrupting minors" with his actions. Paris-based media rights group Reporters Without Borders hailed the court's decision as "logical," but was upset the court didn't go further in bringing improper lawsuit charges against Karimova. (AP)

## **U.S. SHIFTS SUPPLY ROUTES TO CENTRAL ASIA**

**3 July**

The U.S. military is expanding its Central Asian supply routes for the war in Afghanistan, fearing that the routes going through Pakistan could be endangered by deteriorating U.S.-Pakistani relations. "The Washington Post" reports on July 3, citing unnamed Pentagon officials, that in 2009, the United States moved 90 percent of its military surface cargo through the Pakistani port of Karachi and then through mountain passes into Afghanistan. Now almost 40 percent of surface cargo arrives in Afghanistan from the north, along a patchwork of Central Asian rail and road routes. In addition, the U.S. government is negotiating expanded agreements with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and other countries that would allow for delivery of additional supplies to the Afghan war zone. There are currently up to 150,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, including about 99,000 from the United States. (RFE/RL)

## **BRITISH PM CAMERON ON SURPRISE VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN**

**4 July**

U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron, on an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on July 4, said while Afghan security forces were "increasingly confident," Britain planned to withdraw a "relatively small" number of troops. Cameron

arrived on a Royal Air Force plane at Camp Bastion, the main British and U.S. base in the southern Helmand Province. He said he had cancelled a visit to the town of Lashkar Gah so helicopters could be used in the search of a missing British soldier. There are currently 9,500 British troops in Afghanistan.

### **TAJIKISTAN PLANS TO DELIVER AMNESTY**

**4 July**

Tajikistan may declare amnesty in connection with the 20th anniversary of the country's independence, a government source has told Interfax. President Emomali Rahmon is expected to submit an amnesty bill to parliament in late July to early August 2011, the source said. Leader of the Tajik Communists and MP Shodi Shabdolov said that "despite the summer vacation season, the president has a constitutional right to call an emergency session of both houses of parliament to examine the bill." About 10,000 people were amnestied and about half of them were released from prison under the 2009 amnesty, which was timed to coincide with the 15th anniversary of the Tajik Constitution and reduced the number of convicts in penitentiaries to about 11,000, according to the Tajik Prosecutor General's Office. The figure is still too high for the country's penitentiary system. (RFE/RL)

### **STING CANCELS KAZAKH SHOW OVER CRACKDOWN**

**4 July**

Sting has called off a concert scheduled in Kazakhstan Monday to protest repression of striking oil workers. Several thousand workers walked out in May to fight wage cuts, and hundreds have been fired and jailed, the BBC reports. In a statement on his Web site, the singer said Amnesty International, which he has long supported, had informed him of the "unacceptable" situation. "Hunger strikes, imprisoned workers and tens of thousands on strike represents a virtual picket line which I have no intention of crossing," Sting said. "The Kazakh gas and oil workers and their families need our support and the spotlight of the international media on their situation in the hope of bringing about positive change." Sting had been planning to perform at a music festival in the Kazakh capital, Astana, as part of his "Symphonicity" world tour. He was criticized in 2009 for a concert in neighboring Uzbekistan, one of the most repressive Soviet successor states. (UPI)

### **CHEVRON THANKS RUSSIA FOR CASPIAN SUCCESS**

**5 July**

The start of construction on expansions to an oil pipeline in Kazakhstan represents the strong ties between Russia and the Caspian region, Chevron said. Chevron's regional affiliate Chevron Neftegaz announced that construction began on a \$5.4 billion upgrade to a 900-mile pipeline carrying crude oil from western Kazakhstan to oil terminals on the Black Sea. Kazakhstan's emergence as an energy giant is generating international attention. The U.S. Energy Information Agency estimates that Kazakhstan will become a top oil exporter in the next decade. Proven oil reserves are estimated at 30 billion barrels. Neftegaz President Andrew McGrahan said in a statement the expansion project came about in part because of the close ties with Russian energy company Transneft. "(The pipeline consortium) is a model of cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan and is an indication of the confidence we have in Russia and in oil transportation from the Caspian region," he said. The expansion will increase the capacity of the pipeline from 730,000 barrels of oil per day to 1.4 million bpd. It will be completed in three phases through 2015. (UPI)

### **MILITANTS FROM AFGHANISTAN ATTACK PAKISTANI VILLAGES: OFFICIALS**

**6 July**

Up to 600 militants from Afghanistan attacked two Pakistani villages on Wednesday, Pakistani officials said, the latest in a campaign of large-scale raids on civilians and security forces. Militants stormed the border villages of Nusrat Dra and Kharo in the Upper Dir region, fighting soldiers and pro-government tribal militia. "According to reports from the two villages, between 550-600 militants launched the attack at around 5 in the morning and the fighting continued for several hours," police official Abdul Sattar told Reuters. Another official said four pro-government tribesmen who fought along with troops were wounded in the attack. Pakistan says more than 55 soldiers have been killed in several attacks from across the border over the past month. The raids have raised tension between the neighbors as they battle protracted insurgencies by Taliban and al Qaeda-linked militants. Pakistani Taliban fighters who fled to Afghanistan in the face of army offensives have joined allies in Afghanistan to regroup and threaten Pakistan's border regions again, analysts say. Pakistan blames Afghanistan for

giving refuge to militants on its side of the border, leaving its troops vulnerable to counter-attack when it chases them out of the tribal areas and into Afghanistan. Kabul in turn has blamed Pakistan for killing dozens of civilians in weeks of cross-border shelling that has angered Afghans at street level and senior officials alike. The lawless frontier is home to some of the world's most dangerous militant groups, who are intricately linked and cross back and forth to carry out operations. The Pakistan army said on Monday it had launched an air and ground offensive against militants in the tribal region of Kurram which also borders Afghanistan. (Reuters)

### **AZERBAIJAN PLANE CRASHES IN AFGHANISTAN**

**6 July**

An Azerbaijani cargo plane with nine crew on board crashed into treacherous mountains outside the Afghan capital overnight where concerns are growing for those on board, officials said on Wednesday. The plane took off from Baku at 9:26 pm Tuesday (1626 GMT) with 18 tons of supplies for the US-led NATO mission in Afghanistan and crashed as it tried to land at Bagram air base to the north of Kabul, officials said. The Azerbaijani embassy in Pakistan said the nine crew were from Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, and that the plane was operated by private Azerbaijani airline Silk Way. There were no reports of bad weather or fighting in the area and it was not yet clear what caused the crash, with Afghan forces so far unable to reach the high-altitude crash site, the transport ministry said. A spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force confirmed it was a military-contracted flight. "A flight controller at Kabul airport said that they observed a flash of light approximately 25 kilometres (16 miles) from the airport, at a four-kilometre altitude," it said. "Before the loss of contact, the crew did not report any emergency in the plane. It is assumed that the plane collided with an unknown object in the air," the statement added, in a possible reference to the mountains. Afghan transport ministry spokesman Nangyalai Qalatwal said the plane was carrying logistics for the US-led NATO mission when it came down in the Shakar Dara Mountains, around 70 kilometres (40 miles) north of Kabul. "The plane

had nine crew members. The fate of the crew is not known so far," he said, adding that the cause of the crash was still under investigation. Qalatwal said Afghan forces had not yet been able to reach the wreckage, stuck in a mountainous area at an altitude of 12,500 feet (3,800 metres). "It is a very difficult area and getting there would be pretty difficult but we are working on that," he said. Officials from the transport, interior and defence ministries would also travel to the region, he added. ISAF spokesman Major Tim James said there were no reports of combat in the area at the time of the crash. The US-led NATO force backs Afghan government forces in fighting a 10-year Taliban insurgency that has been concentrated in the east and south. Azerbaijani civil aviation authorities said there were no technical problems with the plane before it took off for Afghanistan, adding that it was manufactured in 2005 and last had a full inspection in February. Aviation disasters are relatively rare in Afghanistan, where travel by road through vast and remote terrain is made more hazardous by the Taliban insurgency. (Reuters)

### **MILITANTS WITH AL QAEDA LINKS JAILED IN AZERBAIJAN**

**6 July**

Azerbaijan handed a group of 17 militants jail sentences of between five years and life on Wednesday for links to al Qaeda, a court official said. Azeri security forces arrested most of the men in late 2007 in a sting operation during which they uncovered an arms cache that included machine guns, pistols, hand-grenades and explosives. The group was accused of possessing illegal weapons, creating an armed group, weapons trading, crossing borders and resisting law enforcement officers during arrest. Sandwiched between Iran, Russia and Turkey, Azerbaijan sells oil and gas to the West from reserves in the Caspian Sea, much of the oil flowing through a BP-led pipeline. Most of Azerbaijan's 9 million people are Shi'ite Muslim, but the government under President Ilham Aliyev is strictly secular and an ally of both the United States and Russia. The majority of Azeris take a relaxed attitude towards religion, but officials say Islam's influence in the country is growing. (Reuters)