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## Contents

### Analytical Articles

- KYRGYZSTAN'S INTERACTIVE CRISES AND THEIR BROADER IMPLICATIONS** 3  
Stephen Blank
- KAZAKHSTAN'S DEEPENING TIES WITH EUROPE** 7  
Nicklas Norling
- THE BEGINNING OF WAZIRISTAN'S ENDGAME** 11  
Naveed Ahmad
- RUSSIAN ARMY INCREASES NUMBERS OF NORTH CAUCASIAN CONSCRIPTS** 15  
Huseyn Aliyev

### Field Reports

- GEORGIA'S RULING COALITION DISINTEGRATES** 19  
Eka Janashia
- RUSSIA CONCERNED OVER TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER SECURITY** 22  
Oleg Salimov
- U.S. AMBASSADOR TO KYRGYZSTAN WARNS OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE** 24  
Arslan Sabyrbekov
- ARMENIA BECOMES A MEMBER OF THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION** 26  
Erik Davtyan

# THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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**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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# KYRGYZSTAN'S INTERACTIVE CRISES AND THEIR BROADER IMPLICATIONS

*Stephen Blank*

*Kyrgyzstan is considered the least authoritarian state in Central Asia, but it is also the most crisis-ridden and least stable of these states. Its long-standing domestic weaknesses are compounded by its external crises and only Ukraine has achieved a similar level of instability among post-Soviet states. In both cases, recent revolts have been aided by direct Russian hands-on efforts at destabilization. Kyrgyzstan risks a turbulent 2015 as it faces a decline in Russian subsidies amid pressure to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), along with the interaction of several ethnic, economic, border, and international crises, which Kyrgyzstan's weakening state will unlikely be able to handle.*

**BACKGROUND:** Moscow instigated Kyrgyzstan's 2010 revolution to unseat a government it regarded as treacherous, devious, and overly pro-American because it took Moscow's cash and then preserved the U.S. base at Manas against Moscow's wishes ([See 14 April 2010 CACI Analyst](#)). As most recently demonstrated in Ukraine, it is clear that Moscow is fully prepared to use revolution and violence to install pro-Russian regimes on its peripheries.

Thus Kyrgyzstan faces a never-ending threat to its sovereignty from Moscow. But it also faces Chinese attempts to reduce it to a dependency in economic if not also political terms. Anxiety over Chinese economic power and resentment of Chinese workers has led to a series of ethnic riots and clashes against the Chinese presence in Kyrgyzstan. Local police have proven unable to cope, signifying weakness in these organizations. While China has boosted military aid to Kyrgyzstan and conducted exercises with its domestic forces to improve the situation; it is unlikely to have assuaged the

resentment against Chinese economic power or greatly improved the capacity of state security organizations.



(Source: Brokevo3, via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

But it is precisely the threat to Russian interests prompted by China's presence in Central Asia generally and Kyrgyzstan in particular as well as the enormous increase in Russo-American tensions that drives Russia to lock Kyrgyzstan down as a member of its trade and customs bloc EEU. Yet that drive compounds Kyrgyzstan's problems with independent-minded Uzbekistan, which has adopted a consistently adversarial posture towards Kyrgyzstan. Given Kyrgyzstan's linkages to Russia and its adversarial relationship with Uzbekistan over ongoing ethnic issues,

economics, trade, and water, Kyrgyz analysts worry that the great spike in Russo-American animosity due to Ukraine will adversely rebound upon Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan's crises do not end here. Recruiters for the Syrian rebels and presumably ISIS are recruiting in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Just as Western rulers display anxiety about the possible return of homegrown terrorists to their countries from Syria, the same is true for Central Asia. In addition, Kyrgyzstan was last spring and summer embroiled in numerous armed clashes along the border with Tajikistan, clearly prompted by the same mix of issues that poison its ties with Uzbekistan: border disputes, water use, and ethnic tensions.

Kyrgyzstan's efforts to alleviate its crises appear to have backfired. Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev has repeatedly stated that Kyrgyzstan intends to join Russia's EEU – itself in this region an anti-Chinese formation to reduce China's economic presence in Central Asia while boosting Russia's presence there – by 2015. Moscow has also offered it large subsidies to facilitate this action. In August it pledged US\$ 500 million to support Kyrgyzstan's EEU integration. Beyond this gift, we see the usual pledges (that probably continue to go unfulfilled) about joint participation in major hydroelectric and power engineering projects. But Moscow is also writing off Kyrgyzstan's US\$ 489 million debt to Russia and by investing in a joint investment fund and US\$ 200

million for establishing Kyrgyzstan's disputed borders.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Even if Russia's promises materialize, which is often not the case, it is questionable whether Russian subsidies will allow Kyrgyzstan to overcome its domestic and foreign policy crises. Western sanctions will severely cripple Russian efforts to subsidize other states, not just Kyrgyzstan, in order to achieve its foreign policy goals and these promised funds may therefore not materialize. Second, Kyrgyzstan sold its gas monopoly to Gazprom earlier this year in the belief that Gazprom could actually provide gas, possibly at lower prices. Instead, like its neighbors, Kyrgyzstan is experiencing a gasoline and gas shortage. Electricity prices, the trigger for the 2010 uprising, are expected to rise by 20 percent this winter. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan may fall short by about 25 percent of the water it needs as a power source, which may also affect Kazakhstan. The ensuing restrictions on power will clearly injure the economy. And it is now clear that it will again face a water crisis in 2015, an outcome that will likely further embroil Kyrgyzstan with Tajikistan.

But the crisis goes even deeper. Once Kyrgyzstan sold its energy firm to Moscow, Uzbekistan cut its supplies saying it had no contract with Gazprom and there is still no agreement between Tashkent and Bishkek. Kazakhstan is also blocking Russian fuel trains from going to Kyrgyzstan due to its own fuel shortages. The proximate cause is that sanctions have driven up the price of Russian gas at home, causing producers

to bypass Central Asian markets for more lucrative Russian ones. Thus, the sanctions imposed due to Ukraine will not only rebound on inter-state relations in Central Asia but could also undermine Kyrgyzstan's domestic governance and security while exacerbating the already strong inter-ethnic tensions across Central Asia. Finally, the takeover by Rosneft and other Russian firms of Manas Airport not only consolidates their stranglehold on Kyrgyz energy, it also affords Moscow a base for operations in Kyrgyzstan and all of its neighboring states.

These interactive crises and Russia's growing dependence on China despite its desire to assert itself against China's rising economic dominance in Central Asia, suggest that the EEU is already buckling under the strain of having (predictably) to subsidize weaker economies at a time of mounting Russian economic constraint. But it also suggests that the interaction of the ethnic, economic, border, and international crises, along with Kyrgyzstan's deepening state weakness may make this a hot winter from the political standpoint.

Should Kyrgyzstan fail to sustain itself, Moscow will have to bail it out. This factor also underscores the underlying weakness of both Kyrgyzstan and of Russia, for these imperial subsidies and bailouts are already exacting a heavy toll on an economy crippled by misrule, sanctions, and global economic slowdown. Meanwhile, China is investing a reported US\$ 16.3 billion into its Silk Road Economic Belt

project, much of which will go into Central Asia and further consolidate its superior economic position there vis-à-vis Russia. Hence, while Russia is subsidizing and buying debt, China is investing in infrastructure. The ensuing disparity in outcomes should not be difficult to foresee. Of course, this also hinges on China finding a way to regenerate its high growth rates and to stabilize Xinjiang. If not, its rationale and margin for large-scale investment in Central Asia, whose primary purpose is to help stabilize Xinjiang by making it a regional entrepot, will be compromised.

But if Moscow and/or Beijing prove unable to help Kyrgyzstan out of its difficulties, Kyrgyzstan's future becomes all the more clouded given the internal situation and rivalries among Central Asian states. Neither is it the only state at risk from the concatenation of combined and interactive domestic, foreign policy, and global crises. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will certainly suffer from the diminution of the value of rubles sent back as remittances from the unemployment they exported to Russia. As the value of those workers' remittances fail and as unemployment might grow in Russia these men, if forced back home with no secure economic future, will become a potential powder keg for future unrest.

**CONCLUSIONS:** These factors taken together suggest that despite the undoubted successes of Central Asian governments, they are vulnerable to the pressures emanating from the deteriorating international security and

economic processes now operating throughout the world. These factors will interact with the vulnerabilities and areas of failed policies in their domestic systems to intensify economic hardship, socio-economic challenges, resource constraints, and the potential advent of terrorism either through ISIS or Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan might be the state most immediately vulnerable to these interactive and combined pressures. But it is by no means alone and it is equally uncertain that the resources of those states who aspire to be Central Asia's "security managers," namely Russia and China, will suffice not only to suppress unrest but to help these governments achieve genuine stability as they seek to grapple with these challenges.

This consideration highlights the glaring absence of any coherent U.S. strategy for Central Asia. We have all learned that what originates in Central Asia may not stay there but actually strike directly at critical U.S. interests at home and abroad. Complacency that we do not need to think about the future, in Kyrgyzstan or elsewhere, is hardly a recipe for sound preventive action or at least a coherent response to challenges. Unfortunately, the predicament of Kyrgyzstan as well as its neighbors suggests that 2015 may well be a year of unexpected and severe challenges across Central Asia.

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# KAZAKHSTAN'S DEEPENING TIES WITH EUROPE

*Nicklas Norling*

*On October 9, Kazakhstan and the EU concluded negotiations on an enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, superseding the PCA that had been in force since 1999. The agreement, the first of its kind, is primarily a result of strengthening trade and investment ties between Kazakhstan and EU countries developed over the past 15 years. Kazakhstan is among the most economically EU-oriented post-Soviet states and one of only three whose trade with the EU is growing relative to that with other countries. The enhanced partnership will serve as a foundation to further strengthen these ties but the EU must upgrade Kazakhstan in its list of priority countries to exploit the partnership's full potentials.*

**BACKGROUND:** Kazakhstan and the EU established diplomatic relations in 1992, after which Kazakhstan opened a liaison office in Brussels and the European Commission set up a delegation in Almaty. Kazakhstan and the EU signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1995, shortly after the EU entered into a similar agreement with Russia. The Kazakhstan-EU PCA entered into force in 1999 for a ten-year period and terminated in 2009. Work during these years has been conducted through a Cooperation Council, a Cooperation Committee, various subcommittees, a Parliamentary Cooperation Committee, and regular meetings within the framework of the EU-Central Asia dialogue.

In 2011, joint work began on a new enhanced PCA up to date with the expanding Kazakhstan-EU ties. Eight rounds of negotiations have been held over the past three years, with

particular attention paid to the economic component of the agreement, which had to be brought up to speed with Kazakhstan's membership in the post-Soviet Customs Union and its future accession to the WTO.



(Source: [European Council](#))

The fact that Kazakhstan and the EU have reached the level of an “enhanced” partnership today owes principally to growing economic links between Kazakhstan and Europe. Nearly half of Kazakhstan's gross foreign direct investments since 1991 come from EU countries. Over the past two decades, the EU has become Kazakhstan's

leading trade partner with total trade – imports and exports – in 2013 being valued at nearly US\$ 38 billion. The EU's share in Kazakhstan's total foreign trade has grown from 29 percent in 1999 to 36 percent in 2013 while Russia's share has been nearly halved during these years – from 26 percent to 13.5 percent (all data from IMF's Direction of Trade statistics).

In 2013, only Russia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan had a higher share of EU trade in their total foreign trade among the non-Baltic ex-Soviet countries. It is noteworthy that – with the exception of Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Azerbaijan – the EU's share in total trade among all members of this group of 12 countries declined from 2005 to 2013 (all data from IMF Direction of Trade Statistics). In other words, not only is Kazakhstan one of the most economically EU-oriented but together with Moldova and Azerbaijan it is becoming increasingly so.

Kazakhstan is today the EU's third largest trading partner in the post-Soviet space after Russia and Ukraine and the gap between Ukraine and Kazakhstan – presently US\$ 7 billion – is steadily shrinking. According to Eurostat, Kazakhstan has attracted more FDI from EU countries than any other former Soviet country aside from Russia. The EU's outward stock of FDI to Kazakhstan roughly triples that directed to neighboring Ukraine and amounts to slightly less than half its FDI to Russia.

Among non-OPEC countries, Kazakhstan is the third largest energy supplier to Europe after Russia and

Norway and provides a quarter of Germany's oil. As much as 60 percent of Kazakhstan's oil is exported to Europe. China and other powers have lately been buying as much as they can and Europe's continued success in this endeavor will depend on the strength of the EU-Kazakhstan partnership.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The enhanced PCA is much less far-reaching than the political association agreements and free trade deals that the EU has offered to Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova even if it is more ambitious than the accord it replaced. This reflects, in part, the EU's greater prioritization of the countries involved in its Eastern Partnership program. For example, EU Development Assistance to Central Asia for 2014-2020 amounts to a meager 1 billion euros while that extended to countries participating in the European Neighborhood Policy in the same time period reaches 18.2 billion euros, and include provisions of free trade and visa liberalization.

That being said, Kazakhstan is the first post-Soviet country to have concluded an enhanced PCA with the EU, which lends it some significance. Russia has been negotiating a similar agreement with the EU since 2008 but the talks have now stalled. Thus, the agreement is arguably the most ambitious tried outside of the Eastern Partnership countries and will put Kazakhstan-EU ties on a firmer foundation.

The EU-Kazakhstan agreement stops short of regulating tariffs but extends to other spheres of economic relations, including reduction of non-tariff barriers to trade, services, capital



movements, energy trade, and intellectual property rights. Counting about 280 pages, the agreement spans cooperation in the fields of foreign and security policy, business, sustainable development, cooperation in “justice, freedom, and security”, and transport and trade – totaling around 30 key sector policy areas.

Since 2011-2012, security has increasingly figured into the EU’s key priorities in Central Asia, in part because of the drawdown of NATO troops in Afghanistan. It is conceivable that the EU views Kazakhstan as a stabilizing “anchor state” in Central Asia. Not only is Kazakhstan by far the most developed country in the Central Asian region but it has also played a helpful role in Afghanistan’s reconstruction, e.g. by extending foreign aid, investments, and offering scholarships to Afghan students. Kazakhstan is now in the process of establishing its own regional foreign aid agency, Kazaid, which will be headquartered in Almaty.

The EU appears to belatedly have recognized Kazakhstan’s significance with the adoption of an enhanced partnership. José Manuel Barroso’s visit to Kazakhstan in 2013 was the first ever visit by a President of the European Commission to the country. President Nazarbayev, by contrast, has visited Brussels seven times since 1991. That Barroso has scheduled trips to Azerbaijan almost yearly for the past few years – on par with Chinese and Russian presidents’ tours of Kazakhstan – nonetheless indicates the higher status of the Eastern Partnership

countries, even if the Kazakhstan-EU partnership is enhanced.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The enhanced PCA between Kazakhstan and the EU is a step forward in relations between the two. Yet it seems as if the EU is still somewhat overlooking Kazakhstan’s importance. Kazakhstan will be a key oil supplier to Europe for decades to come and one of the most important sources of energy diversification. While a member of the Customs Union, Kazakhstan is among the most economically EU-oriented of the post-Soviet states and this trend is – in contrast to most other post-Soviet countries – strengthening rather than weakening. EU FDI flowing into Kazakhstan are second only to Russia among post-Soviet states, which is all the more impressive when considered on a per capita basis.

For Kazakhstan, the EU link is critical to its desired development, moving from a solidly middle-income to a high-income country with a Western-type accountable government. While the new enhanced partnership goes some way towards solidifying this link, the EU must show that the partnership is “enhanced” in practice. An annual or biannual heads of state “Kazakhstan-EU summit” – held in Brussels and Astana alternately – would match the diplomatic attention Russia and China gives Kazakhstan and create the conditions needed to fully exploit the potentials of this enhanced partnership.

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# THE BEGINNING OF WAZIRISTAN'S ENDGAME

*Naveed Ahmad*

*Pakistan's semi-autonomous region of North Waziristan has gone through an unprecedented transformation since June. The Pakistani military has launched an all-out assault on the Taliban Haqqani Group's hideouts. The Taliban and its foreign collaborators have either escaped to Southern Afghanistan or remain holed up in their havens. The military's most recent claims put militant fatalities to 910 and its own to 82 officers and soldiers. The fate of the long-awaited military campaign, timed with ISAF's exit from Afghanistan, is crucial not only for the region but also for international stakeholders in the war-torn nation, who nevertheless have different definitions of "success."*

**BACKGROUND:** Since the British colonial era, one-third of the border area between today's Pakistan and Afghanistan has been self-governed with no regular military subordinate to a state. Today, the seven Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are going through an unusual military takeover, with North Waziristan being the last in line. Like the other districts or agencies, North Waziristan is inhabited by ethnic Pashtuns. Bound by an identical Muslim school of thought (*Deobandi*), the tribes are divided by the border composed of the Durand Line.

After the Soviet invasion, Pakistan's tribal areas were used as a launching pad for the Afghan resistance against the Soviet military. Thanks to Saudi Arabia's financial backing, countless religious seminaries mushroomed across the 27,500 square-kilometer stretch, intended to brainwash the Afghan youth to become foot soldiers in the holy war (jihad) against the

Soviet forces. In the early 1980s, various U.S. Congressmen including Charlie Wilson proudly visited the region, shaking hands with locals in front of cameras.



(Source: [Pakistan Army](#))

As the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, local warlords fought for greater territorial control. Besides the western intelligence agencies, hardline but affluent Arabs started courting the Afghan groups. Taking advantage of the adverse Afghan reaction to the infighting, Benazir Bhutto's government in Islamabad helped shape a ragtag militia commonly named Taliban – comprising mostly of Sunni

Muslims who were educated in religious schools near the refugee camps in Pakistan's tribal areas. The then interior minister – late Lt General Naseerullah Babar – hoped to end the chaos in Afghanistan by creating a Pakistan-friendly Afghan militia. The Taliban had established control over 95 percent of the country by 1998, two years after its creation. Besides Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also recognized the Taliban government in Kabul.

Washington had become wary of Afghanistan-based foreign militants after the deadly embassy bombings in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya. Its fruitless cruise missile attacks on eastern and southern Afghanistan led the foreign militants – al-Qaeda – to go underground before launching a set of deadly revenge attacks. However, until 2003 there was no on-ground change in the tribal regions. The foreign militants, who had married local women or brought their own families there, felt at home and roamed freely. As the Pakistani military rulers and their intelligence agencies came under foreign pressure to curb al-Qaeda and the Taliban's clandestine activities, the extremists' strategy changed immensely. With North Waziristan as its headquarters, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) started operating from all the seven tribal agencies, Peshawar and Quetta, executing deadly attacks in Pakistan.

Frustrated by Pakistan's reluctance to launch an all-out operation in Waziristan, the U.S. began a campaign to target the al-Qaeda leadership

through its fleet of Predator drones. Despite being on board, Islamabad publically criticized the U.S. for violating its sovereignty. Nonetheless, Washington was unconvinced that drone attacks could replace a full-scale ground operation.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The Obama administration has long been pressuring Pakistan's political and military leadership to clear the area of militant safe havens, particularly the Haqqani group. Finally, Pakistan's new army chief General Raheel Sharif took the long-awaited decision. So far, the operation has continued at a steady pace to reclaim and clear Pakistani territory of non-state armed groups.

The first and foremost consequence has been massive displacement of the local population. So far almost a million IDPs are camped mainly in the nearby Bannu district. A decade of conflict has left many dead and damaged their agriculture and trade. The population lived in a state of fear due to presence of heavily armed terrorist groups and continuous aerial assaults from U.S. drones as well as Pakistani fighter jets, resulting in a heavy civilian toll. However, the *Zarb-e-Azb* operation has routed the people from their houses, with a cold winter already upon them in the camps. So far, there has been no serious outrage against the operation as the IDPs hope to resume their normal lives upon return to Waziristan with no armed militia taking them hostage, physically or psychologically. The local support for the Pakistani military will be lost if the militias return to their bases after the operation is completed.

Secondly, the operation is being criticized for the military's failure to arrest or kill top-notch Taliban leaders including Mulla Fazlullah and the Haqqanis. Due to a lack of intelligence or action, the elusive militants have made their way to eastern and southern Afghanistan, particularly the Kunar and Nuristan provinces. Some analysts criticize Pakistan for deliberately clearing its territory by letting the militant leaders relocate to volatile Afghanistan. Islamabad blames Kabul for not doing enough on its side to arrest the fleeing terrorists and failing to secure the border to curb militant attacks on the Pakistani military.

Thirdly, it is too early to declare victory as tough strategic battles are yet to take place. Though the army claims to have cleared 80 percent of North Waziristan, regions like Shawal with peaks reaching 20,000 feet and narrow valleys will pose a formidable challenge during the winter season. Like the U.S. drone strikes in tribal areas, Pakistan's Air Force will not suffice in eliminating the terrorists regardless of its accuracy. Aware of the perplexing situation, the generals in Rawalpindi's military headquarters are readying up the troops. General Sharif has been visiting the troops every now and then. To many, it seems that the army chief is directly commanding the military assault. The officers' tactical skills and the soldiers' morale and bravery will be tested in this unseen treacherous territory sooner rather than later.

The Pakistani military has also launched a parallel campaign in Khyber Agency, another district of the tribal

areas. The "Khyber One" operation – aiming to purge the area of Lashkar-e-Islam (LI) militants present in Bara Tehsil and Tirah Valley – is conducted by infantry, artillery, tanks and fighter jets. Pakistan has momentum on its side but the militants have time on theirs. The longer the military campaigns, the greater the chances that the militants gain the upper hand.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Pakistan still has two more vital stages to pass before claiming victory. The current phase is characterized as "clear" while the equally challenging ones remaining are "hold" and "build or rebuild." For the second phase, the civilian government and the military agree to set up a cantonment and an airbase in North Waziristan. There are discussions of other smaller cantonments in some of the seven tribal regions. However, for the "build" phase, the civilian government needs to generate a political consensus to grant equal rights to the citizens of FATA while abolishing the colonial-era Frontier Crimes Regulations. Islamabad also needs to transform the administrative set-up of the FATA from their semi-autonomous status to a fully controlled province. Though there is in principle little disagreement amongst the political parties, the devil lies in the details. To uproot the seeds of extremism and militancy, Pakistan must ensure the provision of economic stimuli alongside an executive framework to the people of the tribal areas. Granting the tribal region provincial status, according to Pakistan's current constitution, will give it economic autonomy in the form

of control over resources and taxes. In this phase, the military will have to take a backseat and let the tribal elders and the parliament sort out the matters.

Things are looking optimistic for now as the Afghan president, chief executive and other cabinet members held cordial negotiations with the Pakistani army chief. General Sharif will be holding talks with the U.S. officials from November 16. With signs of revival of lost trust, both sides have much to deliberate upon during their first high-level engagement after the U.S. and Afghanistan signed the Bilateral Security Agreement allowing the former to establish a permanent presence in the region.

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# RUSSIAN ARMY INCREASES NUMBERS OF NORTH CAUCASIAN CONSCRIPTS

*Huseyn Aliyev*

*The fall 2014 military draft to the Russian army differs from previous conscription campaigns in that, for first time since the early 1990s, the draft will include conscripts from Chechnya. In addition, the number of conscripts from Dagestan was doubled. Observers have connected the Kremlin's increased interest in attracting North Caucasians – previously excluded from the mandatory service – to serve in the Russian army to Russia's involvement in Eastern Ukraine and the dwindling numbers of ethnic Russian conscripts. Yet the actual reasons might be more symbolic and practical, tied to the precondition of military service for government employment eligibility in Russia.*

**BACKGROUND:** A recent announcement by Russia's Ministry of Defense to draft some 500 conscripts from Chechnya and over 2,000 from Dagestan constitutes a complete reversal of Russia's unwillingness to draft into military service residents of the North Caucasian republics, affected by the ongoing Islamist insurgency. The first and last large-scale military draft in Chechnya was conducted in 1992. The start of the First Chechen war in 1994 and a two-decade-long armed conflict that engulfed this republic prevented recruitment in Chechnya to the Russian army. A failed attempt to reintroduce the draft in Chechnya was made in 2001, in the midst of Russia's second military campaign in Chechnya.

A small number of Chechen conscripts are annually recruited to serve in local Chechen military units attached to the Ministry of Interior, known as *kadyrovtsy* owing to their loyalty and

direct subordination to Chechnya's leader Ramzan Kadyrov. As reported by a representative of Chechnya's central military recruitment office (*voenkomat*), 100 young men were drafted last year to serve in the *Sever* (North) battalion based in Chechnya. However, the draft starting on October 1 and continuing until the end of December is the first attempt to draft large numbers of Chechen conscripts.



(Source: Kadyrovtsy3, via [Wikimedia Commons](#))

In Dagestan – a hotbed of Islamist separatist insurgency in the North Caucasus – the compulsory military

draft was never formally cancelled. A senior member of Dagestan's military commissariat told the *Caucasus Knot* the claim that residents of Dagestan are not covered by the compulsory military draft is obnoxious and "far from reality." Indeed, thousands of native Dagestanis were annually drafted into the Russian army since the breakup of the USSR. However, the growth of insurgency related violence in the mid-2000s, increasing chauvinist sentiments within the Russian army and a rise in cases of hazing involving Dagestani recruits, resulted in gradually reduced numbers of Dagestanis in the Russian army. By 2010, less than 500 draftees – a markedly low figure for a republic with a population of over 3 million – were recruited. Many of these recruits were either ethnic Russians or sons of Dagestan's ruling elites.

Analysts have ascribed the unwillingness to draft North Caucasians into the Russian army to fears that military experience gained during military service might be used against Russian authorities if former soldiers decide to join insurgent ranks. Hazing and frequent violent confrontations between conscripts from the North Caucasus and ethnic Russians was also presented as a key reason. While the risk of supplying the insurgency with experienced soldiers is largely an assumption – the training in conventional combat provided by the Russian army would be of little use in insurgent guerilla warfare – hazing, insubordination and other problems connected with North Caucasian recruits are more likely reasons for the

informal cancellation of compulsory draft in parts of the North Caucasus.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Analysts have suggested that the reintroduction of large-scale compulsory military draft to Chechnya and Dagestan is directly related to Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and the decreasing numbers of ethnic Russian conscripts, largely owing to the low birth rates among Russians in the past two decades. Numerous reports have surfaced about Russia's deployment of combatants from the North Caucasus in Eastern Ukraine. Chechens, but also natives of Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Dagestan are present among the pro-Russian separatists of Eastern Ukraine. However, reports of mass desertion, looting, and a lack of discipline among militants of North Caucasian origin put into question their military effectiveness. Their deployment failed to stop the Ukrainian army offensive in May 2014 and the ensuing takeover of separatist headquarters in Slovyansk, as well as the near collapse of pro-Russian forces in and around Donetsk.

Besides, it is unlikely that the total of 4,100 recruits from the North Caucasus to be drafted this year will significantly boost the numerical advantage of the Russian army, which annually recruits 300,000 men and is projected to draft over 154,000 conscripts from across the Russian Federation this fall. As stated by senior members of Chechnya's military commissariat, Chechnya currently has about 80,000 men of conscription age, while the corresponding number in Dagestan is over 200,000, making this fall draft



largely symbolic. Owing to high unemployment rates in the North Caucasus and popular perceptions of army service as prestigious and honorable, service in the Russian army is highly attractive and the numbers of young men willing to serve are significantly higher than those allocated by the quota.

While the recruitment of a limited number of North Caucasians is unlikely to boost the performance of Russian-controlled military units in Eastern Ukraine or help solve the problem of decreasing numbers of conscripts, it will likely exacerbate hazing and the lack of discipline in military units. The unofficial abolition of conscription in Dagestan in the 2000s was accompanied by Russian media reports of numerous cases of hazing, harassment, extortion, insubordination and other criminal activities conducted *en masse* by Dagestani natives serving in Russian army. In 2010, 100 Dagestani natives serving at a military base in Perm were accused of “terrorizing” the entire base, including its commanders. The colonel in charge of the base said soldiers from Dagestan formed “military sub-units” within the base and hazed fellow ethnic Russian soldiers – forcing them to perform all the “dirty” work and extorting money.

However, the issue of North Caucasians hazing ethnic Russians is engrained in contemporary problems of ethno-nationalism and chauvinism in Russian society. Inherent inter-ethnic and inter-cultural problems in the Russian army, which create and sustain an environment of mutual hatred

between ethnic Russian and non-Slavic recruits reflect the general dislike and distrust between ethnic groups in Russian society. The results of a September 2014 public opinion poll conducted by Levada Center, showing that over 40 percent of its respondents felt animosity towards Caucasians. In this context, the marginalization and harassment of North Caucasian recruits – often resulting in the formation of “hazing” groups composed only of non-Slavic conscripts – in the Russian army is inevitable.

Furthermore, interviews carried out by the *Caucasian Knot* in Chechnya in late October on the issue of reintroduced conscription yielded mixed results. While some young people were eager to serve in the Russian army, older respondents were concerned that their sons might be hazed by ethnic Russian officers who previously served in Chechnya and have negative attitudes towards Caucasians. Many of the interviewed parents announced that they will do anything possible to prevent their sons from being drafted.

In this context, the benefits of reintroducing the draft in Chechnya, and doubling it in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria, are questionable. Yet the draft may have a far more practical explanation than the need to employ North Caucasian fighters in Russia’s military theaters. The Russian parliament passed a federal law preventing male applicants without a military service record from applying for government jobs on January 1 2014. Given that the majority of North Caucasian males, particularly

in Chechnya and Dagestan, were barred from serving in the army, they have become ineligible for government work. In total, over 7,300 residents of the North Caucasus are expected to be drafted this fall. This figure exceeds the spring 2014 draft of 1,190 people.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The recent move by the Russian Ministry of Defense to allow small numbers of the region's natives to serve in Russian army is not motivated by a need to boost the fighting capacity of the Russian army with "warlike highlanders" from the North Caucasus. Rather, it is dictated by a need to secure enough human resources to staff local government jobs. Given the lack of interest among Russian public servants to work in the North Caucasus – primarily owing to the lack of human security and salaries lower than in "mainland" Russia – it is crucial for Russian authorities in the North Caucasus to have a sufficient number of local residents eligible to take government jobs. However, the number of North Caucasian recruits to the Russian army will unlikely increase significantly beyond the current quota; the highly competitive and limited number of government jobs in the North Caucasus are distributed selectively to influential individuals from among local elites "loyal" to the Kremlin.

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## GEORGIA'S RULING COALITION DISINTEGRATES

*Eka Janashia*

On November 5, the Our Georgia-Free Democrats (OGFD) party, led by Former Defense Minister Irakli Alasania, quit the ruling coalition Georgian Dream (GD). The departure of one of the founding members of the coalition was the culmination of a political crisis that had been ongoing for a week.

In the end of October, the prosecutor's office arrested the former head of the Ministry of Defense (MoD) procurements department and two incumbent officials from the same department, along with the head and an official of the communications and IT department of the general staff of the armed forces, on charges of mispending GEL 4.1 million through a state-secret tender that allegedly was a sham.

Another set of charges came in early November when the Prosecutor's office blamed three army medical officials and three employees of a state-owned food provider company for negligence resulting in foodborne illnesses of hundreds of servicemen last year.

As the charges were raised, Defense Minister Alasania was on a foreign trip, holding high-level meetings with French and German counterparts while the Chief of the General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces, Maj. Gen. Vakhtang Kapanadze was paying a three-day visit to Estonia.

Upon his return, Alasania states his full support for the detained officials and termed the Prosecutor's move a politically motivated attack on Georgia's Euro-Atlantic course. The arrests took place while the Defense Minister was making efforts to strike a very important deal enhancing Georgia's defense capacities, he said. Several hours after this statement, PM Irakli Gharibashvili sacked Alasania and his deputies from their posts in the Defense Ministry.

In response, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Maia Panjikidze – Alasania's sister in law and his close associate, and the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration Alexi Petriashvili, resigned. Four deputy foreign ministers, Davit Zalkaniani, Davit Jalagania, Tamar Beruchashvili, and Levan Gurgenidze also declared their intention to leave the cabinet, lamenting that Georgia's Euro-Atlantic path is in danger. The decision of the Minister of Justice, Tea Tsulukiani – a member of OGFD – was critical in stifling the ensuing political crisis. After she declared that there was no reason to doubt the government's pro-European stance and opted to retain her post, all deputy foreign ministers except Zalkaliani made a U-turn and kept their posts.

On November 5, at the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition's council meeting, which was also attended by

ex-PM Bidzina Ivanishvili, OGFD announced its departure from the coalition. The step induced Gharibashvili to dub Alasania an “adventurer” and a “stupid and ambitious” politician and accused OGFD of being in a covert alliance with the United National Movement (UNM). Although Alasania initially did not rule out cooperation with any pro-European political force, including the UNM, after the PM’s accusations, he later denied such a perspective.

The U.S. Department of State expressed “concern” over the dismissal of Alasania and his deputy ministers as well as the subsequent resignations of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and Foreign Minister. It announced its appreciation for Alasania’s work and called on the Georgian government to avoid perceptions of selective justice.

Meanwhile, Alasania, who has resumed chairmanship of the OGFD party, stated at the party congress that OGFD, along with the Georgian people, would celebrate victory in the next parliamentary polls, planned for 2016. He also emphasized that the state “should be based on fair laws and not on the will of one man.” This statement echoed President Giorgi Margvelashvili’s earlier remarks. Commenting on the dismissal of the country’s top three ministers, the president stated that “the country should be ruled by strong institutions and not from behind the scenes.”

Margvelashvili could be among those who will gain from the change in political realities. Being exiled from the

coalition, Margvelashvili and OGFD could find common ground for cooperation. The collapse of GD also creates a more favorable situation for the UNM, although the political environment will become more competitive as yet another pro-western party will bid for largely the same segment of the electorate.

In addition, OGFD’s move strengthened the Republican Party’s (RP) positions within the coalition. Before the cabinet reshuffle, RP leaders accentuated the need for GD’s “depersonalization” and “institutionalization,” a position echoed by Margvelashvili’s and OGFD’s recent remarks. In fact, the Speaker of Parliament, RP leader Davit Usupashvili, asserted at the OGFD congress that RP and OGFD will remain partners. It seems that RP can now choose to leave GD at the moment that best suits its interests.

The dismissal of pro-Western ministers could be costly for the ruling coalition. Firstly, it damaged the prestige of GD and exposed its internal fragility. Secondly, it encouraged fluxes in parliament. MPs Tamaz Japaride, Gela Samkharauli and Gedevan Popkhadze quit OGFD and joined GD, while GD deputy chairman of the legal affairs committee, MP Shalva Shavgulidze lined up with OGFD. The reposition left the ruling coalition with exactly 75 seats in the 150-member parliament, one deputy less than needed for a simple parliamentary majority. To avoid failure, GD has absorbed 12 independent deputies who have informally cooperated with GD since

2012. Thus, the coalition will likely attain 87 voices. Nevertheless, three pro-western political forces – OGFD, RP, and UNM, plus president Margvelashvili, now aspire to circumscribe Ivanishvili's grip on power.

On the other hand, it is unclear what levers Ivanishvili will be able to deploy against the OGDF and RP leaders. In his first public comments about the recent developments, Ivanishvili unveiled secret details of the criminal cases against the MoD officials in an attempt to downplay the political dimension of the charges. Thus, the anticipated pressure on opposition leaders and their ability to resist will determine the distribution of political forces in Georgia prior to the 2016 parliamentary elections.

## RUSSIA CONCERNED OVER TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER SECURITY

*Oleg Salimov*

Representatives of Afghanistan took part in parliamentary assembly meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Moscow on November 6. The assembly identified as priorities the threats of terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking in Afghanistan and neighboring Central Asian countries. According to Tajikistan's national information agency *Khovar*, similar questions were discussed during a recent meeting between Tajikistan's President Emomali Rakhmon and the secretary of Russia's Security Council Nikolai Patrushev on October 16 in Dushanbe.

As reported by opposition and independent media in Tajikistan, the meeting was held behind closed doors with only a few reporters of a state-sponsored news agency present. The later issued statement for the press accentuated Tajik-Afghan border security, the perspectives of Russian-Tajik military cooperation, and informational security. Other participants of the meeting in Dushanbe included representatives of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, and Federal Security Bureau. The meeting in Dushanbe and the following CSTO meeting in Moscow were rounded up by Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement of Russia's willingness to assist the Afghan government in its

efforts to restore peace and security in the country.

The conclusion of the active part of the military operation in Afghanistan and the long planned withdrawal of International Security Assistance Forces in 2014 has triggered active consultations among Central Asian countries, Russia, and China in the CSTO and SCO formats. Possessing the longest border with Afghanistan among the Central Asian republics, which stretches through inaccessible mountainous regions, Tajikistan is the most vulnerable to security threats if the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates. Other complicating factors include Tajikistan's fragile political stability, the inability of Tajikistan's military to control the Tajik-Afghan border, and the threats of homegrown Islamic radicals.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is considered by the Tajik government as the main extremist organization spreading the ideas of radical Islam in Tajikistan. The organization confesses to a salafist-wahhabist ideology, possesses strong ties with radicals in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and propagandizes the creation of a worldwide Islamic caliphate. The other extremist organization is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan located primarily on the territory of Afghanistan and having numerous supporters in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The

predecessors of the IMU, founded in 1998, were fighting on the side of Islamic opposition during the Tajik Civil War and also took part in Commander Makhmud Khudoberdiev's attack on Northern Tajikistan in November 1998.

A number of Tajiks are also currently fighting for ISIS in Iraq and Syria and concerns are growing that their return could coincide with a potential restoration of Taliban power in Afghanistan and facilitate coordinated attacks on both sides of the Tajik-Afghan border. According to Tajik state media, five Tajiks were convicted in Tajikistan on charges of terrorism upon return from Syria earlier this year and Tajik officials issued condemnation after reports of a Tajik citizen being appointed by ISIS as the head of Ar-Raqqa in Syria after the fall of the city. While radicalization previously mainly affected Tajikistan's southern regions, observers report a growing number of Islamic radicals in Northern Tajikistan according to *Radio Ozodi*.

The problem is multiplied by the Tajik government's inability to fully control the Autonomous Badakhshan region which borders Afghanistan. Badakhshan became a hideout area for irreconcilable post-Civil war militants and a hotbed of radical Islam. Rakhmon ordered several military operations in Badakhshan after terrorist attacks on Tajik government officials in 2010 and 2012. The military actions had little to no effect in improving security in the region. The nominal government control implies higher penetration of the border by extremists and drug

traffickers, the Tajik government's neglect of which is frequently highlighted by local independent media. Tajikistan is the second largest source of northward trafficking of Afghan heroin after Iran.

The situation deteriorated after the withdrawal of a Russian border patrol contingent in 2005. While Russia continued to maintain an Operational Border Group in Tajikistan after 2005, the recent border cooperation agreement signed in September 2014 foresees the reduction of this group from 350 to 200 specialists and duties void of operational actions to consultation "on request" only. Drug trafficking and the spread of extremists to its southern and predominantly Muslim regions were constant concerns of the Russian government and one of the main arguments for its military presence on the Tajik-Afghan border. This consideration has motivated a proposal of Russian technical military assistance to Tajikistan of up to US\$ 200 million until 2025.

The visit of Nikolai Patrushev to Dushanbe and the following security meeting in Moscow demonstrates Russia's determination to step in after ISAF's withdrawal from Afghanistan. There has so far been no official reaction from Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan, on these perspectives and Vladimir Putin's announcement.

## U.S. AMBASSADOR TO KYRGYZSTAN WARNS OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

*Arslan Sabyrbekov*

The U.S. ambassador to Kyrgyzstan has expressed her concern over the country's ability to maintain and follow the democratic trajectory in light of increasing ties with the Kremlin.

"Kyrgyzstan's growing cooperation with Russia is a challenge to our efforts to support Kyrgyzstan's democracy," Ambassador Pamela Spratlen wrote in an article published on the website of the Council of American Ambassadors earlier this week. "Kyrgyzstan's new leadership would welcome a partnership with the United States, but places a priority on its relationship with Russia, which often comes at our expense. It remains an unanswered question how Kyrgyzstan can maintain its democratic trajectory while pursuing this partnership," Spratlen wrote. The Ambassador did not elaborate on how exactly Kyrgyzstan's democracy was under threat, but she did note that, as a result of pressure from the Kremlin, Bishkek was forced to evict the U.S. Military airbase at Manas, is set to join the Russia-led Customs Union and has largely accepted the Russian narrative of what is happening in Ukraine due to the massive presence of Russian media sources in the country.

The statement of Washington's envoy drew heated discussions in the local political and expert circles. According to Kyrgyzstan's former General Prosecutor Kubatbek Baibolov, the Ambassador's concerns are not

groundless. "It is not a secret that over the course of only one year, Kyrgyzstan has taken a big step back in its democratic development and reforms. Look at how law enforcement bodies are now treating peaceful protesters and civil society groups protesting the decision of the authorities to enter the Russia-led Customs Union," noted Baibolov.

Indeed, signs abound that Central Asia's only democracy is increasingly unable or unwilling to maintain its democratic trajectory. The country has recently adopted initiatives that speak against the fundamental principles of democracy. Last month, Kyrgyzstan's parliament outlawed the promotion of positive attitudes towards non-traditional sexual relations. Many observers detect the hand of the Kremlin, which passed a similar law banning "gay propaganda" last year. The U.S. Embassy in Bishkek issued a statement condemning the legislation, saying that it violates fundamental human rights principles, Kyrgyzstan's democratic gains and constitutional guarantees. The parliament's press office shot back, stating that the U.S. was interfering in Kyrgyzstan's internal affairs.

In addition to this law, discussions are ongoing regarding the adoption of a law similar to that in Russia, requiring foreign-funded NGOs to register as "foreign agents." The law presents a



real threat to Kyrgyzstan's relatively vibrant civil society and aims to limit their activities. These initiatives are not coincidental and indicate Moscow's efforts to impose undemocratic views on its allies. As *New York Times* columnist Masha Gessen put it, "the promotion of Russian style legislation and ideology is a stealthy expansionist project."

As ambassador Spratlen also noted, all these worrying developments seem to demonstrate that Kyrgyzstan's increasing cooperation with Moscow might be coming at the expense of the country's democratic achievements. A common view among local political analysts is that due to the country's heavy economic dependency on Moscow, Bishkek has no other option but to join the Kremlin's integration projects. According to the ex-speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament Zainidin Kurmanov, from the economic standpoint, neither the European Union, nor the U.S. have much to offer Central Asia's only democracy, facing serious socio-economic challenges and risks. In his words, "further cooperation with the EU and the U.S. can take place in the framework of the democratic governance agenda."

During her recent visit to Bishkek, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Fatema Sumar reiterated Washington's readiness to further support democracy in Kyrgyzstan and called on the country to stay open and strengthen its relatively active civil society. Commenting on ambassador Spratlen's article, Sumar replied that it contained

nothing that the State Department hadn't stated before.

In the meantime, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has approved Spratlen's nomination as U.S. Ambassador to neighboring Uzbekistan. If confirmed for the post by the full Senate, it will be Spratlen's second ambassadorial post, in a country that is far less democratic and is considered by many to be reemerging as Washington's main regional partner.

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

## ARMENIA BECOMES A MEMBER OF THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION

*Erik Davtyan*

On October 9-10, Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan paid a working visit to Minsk to take part in a session of the Council of Heads of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). After the CIS summit, Sargsyan participated in a session of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, during which he signed the agreement on Armenia's accession to the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Thanking the heads of states for their political support in this process, the Armenian president assured that Armenia "will show a high sense of responsibility towards its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union" and expressed the hope that the heads of the EEU member countries will facilitate the ratification of the agreement in their national parliaments till the end of this year. Russia's President Vladimir Putin expressed his deep conviction that "Armenia is ready to work equally with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in the framework of the EEU."

The process of Armenia's accession to the EEU started more than a year ago, after it was declared as a foreign policy objective in Sargsyan's statement on "Armenia's desire to get accessed to the Customs Union," made on September 3, 2013. Considering that the statement was made on the threshold of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, where Armenia was expected

to initial an Association Agreement with the EU, it represented a turning point of Armenian foreign policy.

The post-soviet direction of Armenian foreign policy and especially Armenian-Russian relations is one of the most debated topics in Armenian politics and Armenia's accession to the EEU was given highly diverse verdicts from different observers. According to Aram Safarian, president of the NGO Integration and Development, Armenia's "accession to the EEU will reinforce the security of Armenia and will present Armenia's stance in the region in a more favorable way." The same view was shared by economist Ashot Tavadian, a member of the Scientific Council of the Eurasian Bank. In an interview to Armenian daily *Hayots Ashkharh*, Tavadian said that if it would have remained outside the EEU, Armenia would have faced serious challenges in the spheres of energy, direct investments and export.

The agreement, signed on October 10, was closely scrutinized by Armenia's political parties. According to the deputy of the Prosperous Armenia (PA) party's faction of the National Assembly, Stepan Margaryan, PA favors any integration process that Armenia can join. In an interview to *Zhoghovurd* daily, Shirak Torosyan, a member of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Foreign

Relations, emphasized that there are currently no beneficial alternatives to the Eurasian market, and believed that especially the customs regulations that will be introduced in the EEU members will be economically beneficial for Armenia.

In contrast, the Heritage party is the only political party that strongly disapproves of the Eurasian vector in Armenia's foreign policy. Expressing their viewpoint to *Tert.am*, members of the Heritage Faction in the National Assembly, Tevan Poghosyan and Alexander Arzoumanian said their faction is against Armenia's participation in Eurasian integration processes and will vote against the ratification of the agreement.

The former head of the Armenia's National Security Service Davit Shahnazaryan stated in an interview to *Aravot* that since Armenia has little economic cooperation and actually shares no common borders with the other members of the EEU, Armenia will face economic challenges that could lead to a significant economic decline and a deterioration in living conditions. Moreover, some experts insist that the October 10 agreement was unconstitutional. Artak Zeynalyan and Daniel Ioannisyan, respectively representing the NGOs Rule of Right and Union of Informed Citizens, claim that certain clauses of Armenia's Constitution do not allow the partial delegation of state sovereignty to other institutions.

Commenting on the possible effects of Armenia's EEU membership on regional geopolitics, the founding

director of the Regional Studies Center (RSC), Richard Giragosian, said that Armenia's accession to the EEU may have a negative impact on Armenian-Georgian relations, as well as on the prospect for opening the border between Turkey and Armenia. According to political scientist Levon Shirinyan, Armenia should take advantage of its EEU membership and avoid the challenges. The expert believes that "Armenia can become a scientific-industrial unit which will serve the economic, scientific and technical market of the Eurasian Union."