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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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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.

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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.

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EU-TURKMENISTAN TALKS: BRUSSELS SEEKS COMMON CENTRAL ASIA POLICY

Erica Marat

The April 9-10 meeting in Ashgabad between the EU “Troika” and Turkmen officials has marked yet another step towards the implementation of the EU-Central Asia partnership strategy. According to “Troika” officials, Turkmenistan is willing to supply gas to the EU’s Nabucco pipeline project. Yet the success of the Nabucco pipeline is contingent on a myriad of factors, with skeptics doubting the project will be realized. Besides its economic feasibility, Nabucco’s success will depend on Turkmenistan’s relations with its biggest gas client – Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan’s decision to participate in the project, and the EU’s domestic pressures that prioritize human rights and democratization processes ahead of strategic cooperation.

BACKGROUND: The EU “Troika” delegation was represented by Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, EU Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel, and EU External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. Engaging Turkmenistan into the Nabucco pipeline project represents part of the EU’s broader strategy in Central Asia, formulated alongside the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the EU’s goal to assure energy security in the 2010-20s. The Nabucco pipeline plans to supply gas to Europe from Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan. After being introduced by the German Presidency in 2007, the EU Central Asia partnership strategy has become a foreground indicator of the EU’s changing

policy towards its neighbors in the East. Germany’s achievement in formulating the strategy and attracting the EU’s attention to the Central Asian region within the ENP marked one of Germany’s major successes during its January-June 2007 EU presidency. Together with Morel, the German Presidency was able to effectively engage all 27 EU members into a debate over the strategy and its consequent endorsement. The strategy was adopted by the European Council in June 2007, and since then the EU has moved into the implementation stage.

According to representatives from the German Foreign Ministry, the results accomplished by the two consequent presidencies – the Portuguese and Slovenian – exceeded initial expectations.



Both EU members continued Germany's course of action in 2007-2008. To date, no EU partner has reported a misdeed or expressed discontent in the strategy's early implementation phase. More EU members expressed interest in expanding diplomatic presence in the region. Furthermore, France seems enthusiastic about continuing implementation of the Central Asia strategy, during its presidency scheduled for July-December 2008.

Despite the fact that most EU members agree on Europe's need to diversify its energy resources and decrease dependence on Russian gas, they split into hardliners and softliners when it comes to the EU's partnership with the Central Asian states. While some members emphasized the importance of strategic cooperation with resource-rich Central Asian countries, others view the poor human rights record and authoritarianism there as an obstacle for a greater EU engagement. The UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Sweden in particular, argue for paying greater attention to democratization processes in the Central Asian states before energy trade is considered. The EU's new member states in particular are in favor of economic sanctions towards some Central Asian states, in a similar way that sanctions would be posed "on Burma or African states." According to Dr. Andrea Schmitz from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, the current EU and Central Asia partnership strategy document represents the smallest common denominator among the EU member states with regards to the engagement in the region.

IMPLICATIONS: Turkmenistan's president Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov visited Brussels in November 2007 and promised to visit France this year, which is already a telling sign of changes in his foreign policy and intensifying relations with the EU. However, some EU officials admit that Turkmenistan has been a difficult partner due to the absence of a "culture of dialogue" in the country during a nearly fifteen-year policy of international isolationism. The potential capacity of Turkmenistan's gas imports remains uncertain – though an independent survey is under way – and important details of the Turkmen government's recent deal with China on building a gas pipeline is also unknown to the EU. According to

experts from the EU Parliament's Delegation in Central Asia, so far Turkmenistan was able to play the EU's interest in its gas for its own benefit. By showing interest in cooperation with the EU, Turkmenistan increased the gas prices paid to it by Russia's Gazprom in December 2007.

According to some EU officials, in case the EU will be unable to achieve its goals in the energy partnership with Central Asia, there is a high possibility that the implementation of the strategy's human rights, rule of law, and democratic reforms will slow down as well. However, if the EU shows itself able to broker deals with Turkmenistan, some EU officials see a danger of the political consequences of such engagement. The EU might encounter criticism from local NGOs for overlooking state authoritarianism and the human rights record.

The future success of the Nabucco project is contingent on a variety of factors, some of which are not related directly to Turkmenistan. Turkey is a major player which the EU must consider while planning Nabucco. Unlike the EU, the Turkish government sees the role of Turkey as more significant in the Nabucco project than just being a transit country, and both sides yet have to negotiate their political and economic cooperation conditions. Turkey's potential EU membership turns the EU-Turkey talks over Nabucco into a political issue. The Ukrainian government has been making use of the EU's strained relations with Turkey over its membership application status and, in particular, over the Nabucco project. Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko has been promoting the Black Sea corridor for the Nabucco pipeline leading from Georgia to Ukraine and further to western Europe.

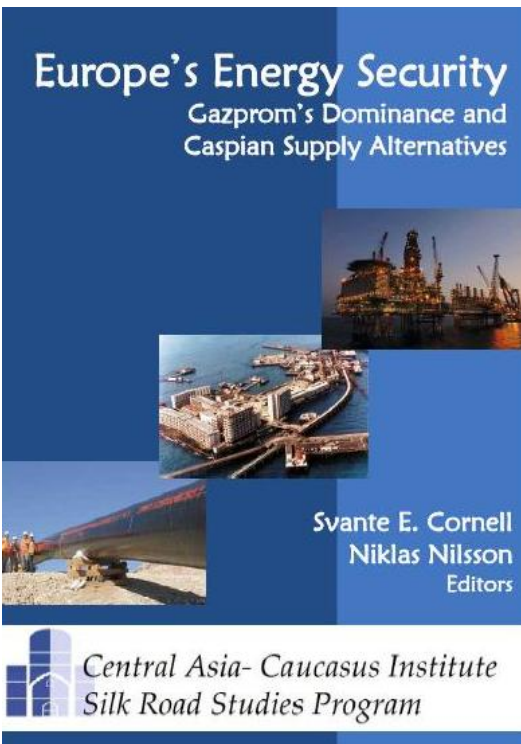
EU-Russian relations are indeed another important factor in the EU Central Asia partnership strategy. While EU members realize the importance of Russia in the EU engagement in Central Asia, the strategy does not specify what role Russia will play in the EU-Central Asia relations. This shortage practically leaves room for deciding how and when Russia will be incorporated in EU-Central Asia relations. The EU insists that it is essential to maintain a transparent approach to the Central Asian states by treating Russia

as an ally with similar goals in the region. For instance, the EU calls for Russian assistance in integrating the Central Asian states in international politics and economy. But the Kremlin considers the EU's plans on Nabucco as a political project that lacks economic viability. For instance, Sergei Kulik, Head of the Russian Department of Relations with the EU, argues that the EU presents its strategy towards Central Asia as purely humanitarian, namely, to help the region to alleviate poverty and build democracy. But he insists that the EU's real interests are driven by energy resources in Central Asia. Kulik further comments that Nabucco will likely succeed.

CONCLUSIONS: To date, the EU strategy in Central Asia has been a difficult balancing act for the EU presidency, the EU Commission and the EU High Representative for Central Asia – not to speak of member states. Since June 2006, the EU has achieved greater results than either optimists or pessimists had initially expected. The EU-Turkmenistan energy partnership is yet to gain its momentum in coming months, while many challenges still lay ahead. To a

great extent, Berdymukhammedov's own interest in building cooperation with Europe will predetermine the success of the Nabucco project. Potentially, Uzbekistan might also become a high priority for the EU. Uzbekistan's gas exports can possibly be linked to the Transcaspian corridor. With that, the EU is facing a daunting task of promoting human rights and democratization in the Central Asian region, in part to meet the demands of some of its members and local NGOs. Importantly, the EU recognizes that each Central Asian state is a separate entity with its specific traits that requires a tailored approach. However, EU officials have not yet sorted out the relationship between Europe's various interests in Central Asia's energy, security, and democratization. Until they do so, the confusion regarding European interests is likely to prevent a coherent policy from emerging.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Erica Marat is a Research Fellow with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center.



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KAZAKHSTAN, THE NEW COUNTRY OF IMMIGRATION FOR CENTRAL ASIAN WORKERS

Marlene Laruelle

Although Kazakhstan experienced significant net emigration throughout the 1990s, it has now become a republic of immigration in the space of a few years. Large numbers of migrants from the other Central Asian countries are drawn to Kazakhstan because it is easier to move there than to Russia; xenophobia is much less rife; and the rhythm of economic development makes it very attractive in salary terms. According to official estimates, about 500,000 migrants from other Central Asian Republics work in Kazakhstan. At the CIS summit in October 2007, the Kazakh government distinguished itself by moving to have adopted a resolution on a series of legally and socially protective measures for migrants.

BACKGROUND : More than half of Kazakhstan's Central Asian migrants are comprised of Uzbeks, while around 200,000 are Kyrgyz and around 50,000 Tajiks. The majority of migrants are concentrated in four regions: Almaty, Astana, Atyrau and southern Kazakhstan. In the first two regions, migrants are chiefly employed in the construction industry, which is undergoing a real boom, while in Atyrau, several tens of thousands of workers (according to some sources, at least 30,000 Uzbeks) work in the oil industry. In southern Kazakhstan, predominantly Uzbek migrants are employed in the agricultural domain, especially in cotton fields. In Kazakhstan, a kilogram of cotton pays US\$0.40 compared with only 0.05 in Uzbekistan. As for the Kyrgyz, a large number of them work on tobacco plantations.

The migrants are specialized in several different sectors: according to estimates, nearly a third work in the construction industry, another third in convenience services (the food service industry, small business, home repairs services), and the last

third in agriculture. The highest salaries are in the construction sector (about US\$200 per month), whereas those in agriculture are much lower (about US\$80 per month). Although men constitute the overwhelming majority of migrants, there is an increasing number of women migrants: in 2002, women made up only 15 percent of Uzbek migrants to Kazakhstan, but by 2004 they made up nearly a quarter. Kazakhstan indeed lacks employees in sectors largely staffed by women, such as agriculture, the tertiary sector of the food service industry, and domestic services.

The Central Asian migrations to Kazakhstan can be divided into three categories: daily, temporary, and permanent. The first takes place notably in the border regions of southern Kazakhstan, where an increasing number of Uzbeks commute to work on the Kazakh side of the border during the day, and return home at evening. Regular border closures and administrative complications at customs thus trigger strong tensions among villagers who have become economically dependent on being able to

cross the border. The border post at Zhybek Zholy, for instance, is crossed by more than 4,000 Uzbek migrants each day. But for the majority of migrants, leaving for Kazakhstan is temporary. The length of stays thus vary largely depending on available opportunities: mostly they last between two and eight months, with construction works taking place in spring and summer, and work in the fields taking place in the fall. Many hope to return to their own countries after accumulating sufficient capital to construct a house or start up a small business. However, there are increasingly more migrants seemingly intent on staying on a permanent basis. As a matter of fact, between 1999 and 2004, more than 130,000 Uzbeks, drawn by higher living standards (an average Uzbek salary is around US\$40

socially. Accordingly, in 2006, the Minister of the Interior legalized 164,000 migrants from other CIS countries, despite having initially announced a figure of only 100,000. Out of this number, nearly 120,000 were from Uzbekistan, 23,000 from Kyrgyzstan, 10,000 from Russia and nearly 5,000 from Tajikistan. Astana's open policy on migration has also led to the naturalization of many migrants: in 2005, more than 20,000 persons were granted Kazakhstani citizenship, three-quarters of whom were from Uzbekistan, 10 percent from Kyrgyzstan, and 5 percent from Tajikistan. The aim of this voluntarist policy is to counteract the country's falling population and the resultant reduction in its labor force, and it is complemented by strategies inviting Kazakhs of the diaspora, especially from Mongolia, to "return".



Uzbek Migrant in Kazakhstan (South Kazakhstan, November 2003)

dollars, compared to 250 in Kazakhstan), moved to Kazakhstan permanently.

IMPLICATIONS: The Kazakh authorities are fully aware of the size of the migratory phenomenon and do not wish to resist it. On several occasions, the government has even stated that its citizens are not in competition for work with migrants because the latter fill a specific social niche, as they take the poor paying jobs refused by Kazakhstani citizens. The authorities nevertheless are seeking to reduce illegal immigration and to encourage legal migration, which is better controlled judiciary and

Although migratory relations between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are good, managing migratory flows between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has proved more difficult. Tashkent refuses to acknowledge the scale of the phenomenon. The Uzbek state has a monopoly on the legal dispatching of workers abroad, meaning each migrant is obliged to obtain official authorization from the Uzbek Agency of Work Migration. Since 2006-2007, the Uzbek government has also sought to hive off some of the financial flows of its "Gastarbeiters". According to a government resolution "On registration of citizens seeking employment abroad", Uzbek labor migrants have to come back to Uzbekistan, go through registration and pay customs dues before returning to work abroad. As a result, the majority of Uzbeks leave without legal permission and thereafter are unable to seek protection from their guardian state. This situation promotes human trafficking and the organization of mafia networks by recruiters who go from door to door asking for volunteers to work in Kazakhstan.

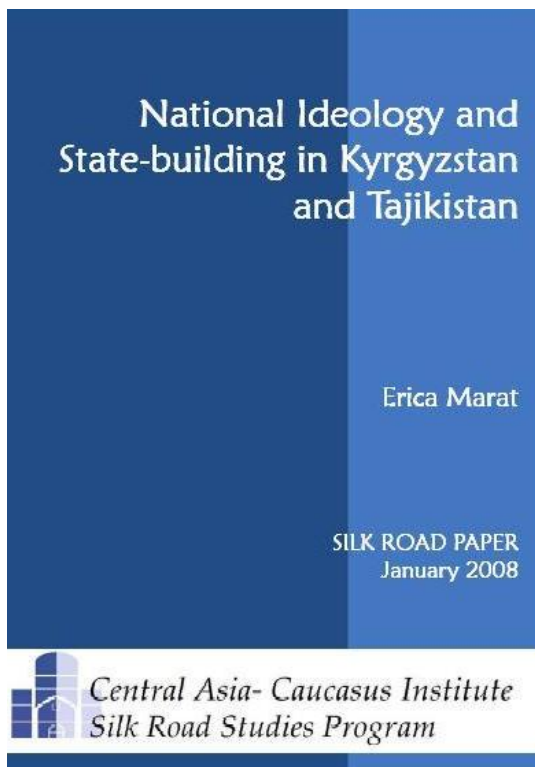
The working conditions of Central Asian migrants in Kazakhstan are still very poor. Legislation

dealing with immigration continues to be largely insufficient, failing to penalize abusive employers and to guarantee a minimum of social rights to migrants. The Kazakh police force does not seem in a hurry to denounce companies that employ migrants illegally. So, the very size of illegal migration tends to reinforce corruption in the police, the administration, and the customs services. A massive legalization is thus in the public interest, since it would enable these populations, services and money flows to become official, and therefore controllable.

CONCLUSIONS: Since Kazakhstan has a relatively low birth-rate compared with that of its Central Asian neighbors and was badly hit by the massive emigration of its Slavic population, its authorities have understood the necessity of an open migration policy. In fact, the country will be

needing more than a million additional workers until 2015; migrants, then, are also contributing to Kazakhstan's development and economic success. Moreover, since labor out-migration is postponing unemployment-fuelled social tension and socio-political instability in Kyrgyzstan and in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan contributes to stability throughout Central Asia, taking on the role of the region's economic leader.

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IRAN AND THE SCO: A MATCH MADE IN DUSHANBE OR IN MOSCOW?

Stephen Blank

Speaking in Dushanbe on March 24, Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki announced that Iran had formally applied for membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The occasion for this announcement was interesting because it was made in Dushanbe, not in Teheran. Tajikistan openly proclaimed its support for Iranian membership. Tajikistan, which was brought to the brink of devastation by the exceptionally cold winter of 2008, may be looking for political and economic support so proclaiming its support for Iran could be a cheap way of gaining such support from Iran.

BACKGROUND: On December 27 2007, the day former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov suggested that the SCO expand its membership to include Iran and Pakistan despite a current moratorium on expanding the SCO's membership. Russia's motives demand an explanation. First, Losyukov conspicuously omitted Russia's closest Asian partner for many years, India, and supported China's candidate and India's rival, Pakistan. This was a concession to China because China had supported Pakistan's membership in the SCO but opposed India's. As discussed in the 5 March issue of the CACI Analyst, [<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4807>], that motive was and is connected with Moscow's unhappiness over India's increasing gravitation towards the United States. Third, Russia and Iran have been calling for both a global gas cartel and an energy club within the SCO which they would undoubtedly dominate and use as another way to compel Central Asian members to supply energy to China, and other states who are not members, on Russia's terms. Likewise, admitting two new members might also dilute China's weight in the organization. Since China is a price-taker in energy and given Russia's visible unreliability as energy supplier, this may not actually be to China's interest and there are many other obstacles to realizing an energy cartel through the SCO, such as the likely

unwillingness of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to submit to outside dictation.

Earlier Russian efforts to bring Iran in as a new member to the SCO also failed. In 2006-07, Russian analysts advocated Iranian membership and the members' Foreign Ministers seriously discussed this possibility in 2006. At the time, Iranian membership was rejected because of the current delicate stage of the negotiations over Iranian nuclearization. Russia and China ultimately refrained from supporting Iran despite their support for its negotiating position, so as not to confront Washington directly on this subject at a particularly delicate time in the negotiations.

As Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said, the SCO would not bring Iran into membership if that meant defending it against Washington for its nuclear proliferation, a proposition that he called moronic. Furthermore, members like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan publicly opposed such membership and Iran's nuclear program. They fully realize that either the success of Iran's nuclear program, or an American attack on Iran, entails new threats to regional security and potential disturbances that they prefer not to confront. Furthermore, under the SCO charter, members might be asked to defend Iran if America attacks it, even though such attacks hardly are due to terrorism, separatism, or extremism, the three *casus belli* in that charter. The Central Asian states also opposed membership

because adding new members outside Central Asia would dilute their weight in the organization and involve them in other countries' agendas, something decidedly not to their taste. They opposed it also because they knew that inviting Iran represented a deliberate and serious affront to America with whom they must interact and trade and whom they see no reason in gratuitously insulting. Kazakhstan in particular opposes adding new members because its rising influence would then be eclipsed by that of Iran, Pakistan, and/or India, the logical candidates for future membership. And it is unlikely that Central Asian states want to add another nuclear power to the organization given their commitment to denuclearizing the region, especially when it is a rogue state like Iran.

Yet between then and now none of this has changed. If anything, the nuclear issue has grown more acute, making the reasons for postponing discussion of the issue more pressing. Nevertheless, Russia and Iran have both gone forward with Tajikistan's support. This begs the question why.

IMPLICATIONS: Iran's motives are the most straightforward. Yet it took three months after Losyukov's call to apply for membership. Iran appears to feel that it can count on Moscow's and maybe Beijing's support, as they are clearly reluctant to vote for sanctions against it. Moscow even went out of its way to say that the new sanctions it voted for were of minimal significance and it would have vetoed anything else so it watered them down. Iran probably therefore waited for someone beside Moscow to support this publicly. Getting Tajikistan to do so in return for the promise of support probably was the *quid pro quo* for which Tehran was waiting. Possibly Tajikistan may also have thought it was doing something Moscow wanted in return for which it would get more Russian support as well. This way, it does not look like Iran is coming in on Russia's coattails but as a state enjoying Central Asian support. After all, three days later on March 27, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russo-Tajik relations were systemic, that his purpose aimed to strengthen coordination between the two

governments regarding international institutions like the SCO and the CSTO, Moscow's regional military alliance and the Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC).

He also promised more – and more systematic – aid to Tajikistan. Thus Dushanbe's motives may have been largely pecuniary and Moscow's an attempt to prevent Tajikistan from soliciting outside help for its problems. This consideration is more important considering that the public response to Losyukov's statement was embarrassed silence, not assent. But it also suggests that Tehran may be trying to force Moscow's hand and get more guarantees of its security from Russia and China

Yet the public response to Iran's application has again been cautious. Leonid Moiseyev, Putin's Special Representative for SCO affairs, reminded everyone that the moratorium on new members still exists and pointed out that common criteria for membership and for taking in new members do not exist, and these tasks must take precedence along with the interests of the existing full members. A number of Russian specialists like Alexander Lukin, who directs the Moscow State Institute for International Relations' East Asian and SCO Affairs Center, observed that Iran must change its confrontational foreign policy towards other governments, the UN, and the IAEA before being admitted. China lauded Iran's desire to strengthen its ties to the SCO but refrained from support, and the SCO itself was studiously non-committal. Indeed, it reportedly is giving the UN information on Iran's nuclear program, hardly a sign of confidence in Iran's policies.

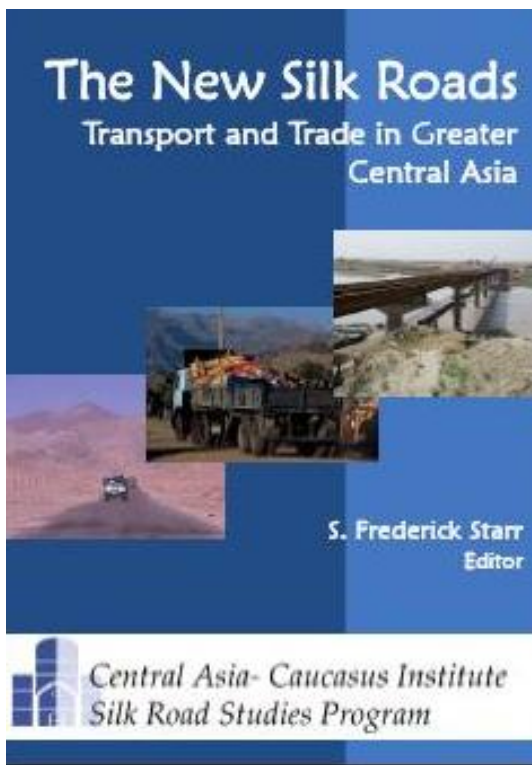
CONCLUSIONS: Moscow probably wants Iran to join the SCO. In the last few months, Uzbekistan has accepted a NATO base at Termez, NATO simply brushed off Russian objections to Kosovo's independence as being of no account and has promised to take in Georgia and Ukraine as members, while also supporting American missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic. Moscow has few counters to this except support for Iran and efforts to intensify its ability to use the energy card. One aspect of its activities is renewed

emphasis on big deals with and in Iran for Gazprom and other Russian energy companies. And its earlier motives for supporting Iran's membership continue to exist.

Yet China's motives for resisting this also continue. From its standpoint not only does Iranian membership throw a gauntlet down to America, it also threatens China's energy independence along with that of its Central Asian suppliers by opening a way to an energy cartel within the SCO where everyone else would be dependent on Moscow and to a lesser degree Tehran for energy supplies at what are essentially dictated prices. Third, taking Iran into the SCO would convert it into an openly anti-American bloc and thus contradicts a fundamental point in Chinese foreign policy, namely China's principled opposition to all military-political blocs and alliances. Despite Russia's frequent efforts to

move the SCO in that direction, China has consistently resisted converting the SCO into a military or political bloc. Taking in Iran openly undermines that principle and imports all of Iran's security rivalries into the SCO, including potentially the obligation to defend it by more than words in the UN against military threats to it that Tehran's own provocative actions have brought on. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Iran's application was greeted more with wary caution than with open delight.

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THE ANTI-NARCOTICS NARRATIVE AND THE BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Kevin Daniel Leahy

There are few things that the Russian authorities and the rebel movement in the North Caucasus can claim to agree on. But they are united on one point: their mutual concern about the increased pervasiveness of narcotics in the region. This apprehension is shared by the vast majority of ordinary people in the North Caucasus. It follows, therefore, that there is much political capital to be accrued through adopting a tough stance against drugs – a point that has not gone unnoticed by the rebels or their nemeses within the local pro-Moscow political structures.

BACKGROUND: Over the past several years, rebel Jamaats throughout the North Caucasus have carried out several punitive operations against drug dealers and gambling establishments. In February 2006, for example, North Ossetia's Jamaat "Kataib al-Khoul" bombed three separate gambling establishments in Vladikavkaz. A subsequent statement elaborated on the rebels' watchful mandate: "The founders and owners of dens like this who will continue their business will be severely punished as accessories to moral decay. We will pay special attention to drug traffickers and dealers in Ossetia...We will come after them when they least expect it".

That April, two months after this statement, Kataib al-Khoul announced that it had detained an unspecified number of drug dealers in the disputed Prigorodny district of North Ossetia who were subjected to "physical punishment" and warned against re-offending under pain of death. Similar anti-drug, anti-gambling mandates have been assumed by Jamaats in neighbouring republics. This past February, the Ingush Jamaat distributed fliers in towns and villages across Ingushetia threatening "those who for the sake of personal enrichment participate in the debauchery of our brothers and sisters" – in other words those involved in the gambling industry and the drug trade – with

"physical destruction" unless they desist from their activities. In neighboring Kabardino-Balkaria, the republic's rebel organization has consistently presented itself as a staunch opponent of the local drug trade. As far back as December 2004, Kabardino-Balkaria's "Yarmuk" Jamaat attacked the local branch of the Federal Drug Control Agency in Nalchik. Yarmuk had accused this agency of complicity in the local drug trade.

The stark social reality of a burgeoning drug trade has served as a platform for all manner of political posturing by insurgent movements throughout the world. In Northern Ireland during the mid-1990s, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), operating under the cover name "Direct Action Against Drugs" (DAAD), launched a campaign against drug dealers in areas where its popular mandate was strongest. Typically, suspected dealers would be subjected to a serious physical assault – a "punishment beating", to use the vernacular – and warned not to sell drugs again. Occasionally dealers were even shot dead without warning.

This vigilantism emerged at a time when the IRA was officially observing a ceasefire in its conflict with the British state which was not universally popular among the republican rank and file. According to Ed Moloney, an historian of the IRA, the activities of DAAD amounted to "the IRA

leadership sending out the signal to its own people that it was not afraid to go back to the gun". Killing British soldiers once again would automatically mean an end to the ceasefire; killing social miscreants like drug dealers reassured recalcitrant rank and file members that physical force

use and drug dealing. When the then-Chechen rebel President, Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev, was assassinated in June 2006, Kadyrov claimed with ill-concealed derision that Sadulayev had been betrayed by a member of his entourage in exchange for \$50 with which to buy drugs.



Dokka Umarov

republicanism wasn't dead while securing praise and support from anxious parents, concerned lest their children fall victim to these harmful social elements.

IMPLICATIONS: Organizations like Kataib al-Khoul have no need to mask their activities by adopting acronymic aliases. Quite the contrary in fact: the leaders of the North Caucasus insurgency are eager to associate themselves and their respective organisations with open challenges to perceived moral degeneracy. So too are local pro-Russian leaders like Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. Kadyrov has styled himself as a scourge of contemporary moral vices obtaining in Chechnya such as the consumption of alcohol, drug-taking, gambling and prostitution. Kadyrov has consistently tried to damage the rebel movement by manipulating the social stigma associated with drug

Thus, title over the anti-narcotics narrative does not reside exclusively with the rebel movement. Nevertheless, for the rebels in particular, this narrative, and the generalized struggle against perceived moral laxity, has a number of ulterior motives. Firstly, for a small, developing militant organization like Kataib al-Khoul, the execution of local drug dealers probably represents the limit of its current operational capabilities. Kataib al-Khoul did, however, claim responsibility for shooting

down a Russian helicopter in September 2006. Its leader, Alan Digorsky a.k.a. Emir Saad, claimed to have personally shot down the helicopter using a shoulder mounted projectile. This has nevertheless never been independently ascertained.

The bombing of gambling halls and the harassment of drug dealers ensures what could be called positive notoriety for Kataib al-Khoul as well as providing small-time operational experience for Jamaat members. Indeed, the extent to which the North Caucasian rebels are capable of mounting future large-scale military operations is a point of contention. The last large-scale insurgent operation in the region, the attack on Nalchik in October 2005, came over two and a half years ago and was an operational catastrophe. That raid was led by Anzor Astemirov, leader of Kabardino-Balkaria's Jamaat, who was recently appointed head of the rebels'

sharia court. Astemirov reportedly helped convince Chechen leader Dokka Umarov to controversially declare the establishment of a “Caucasian Emirate” on the territory of the North Caucasus late last year.

This brings us to the second ulterior motive behind the rebels’ regional war on moral degeneracy: the absence of popular enthusiasm for radical Islam per se. It is a happy coincidence for rebel ideologues like Astemirov and the Chechen propagandist, Movladi Udugov, that popular indignation concerning drug use and abuse of alcohol overlap with the strictures of sharia law. There are, however, other aspects of sharia law which, should Astemirov and Udugov ever get the opportunity to implement it, would doubtless prove less palatable for the peoples of the region. A brief taste of what sharia law might entail for the region can be found by reviewing Chechnya’s ill-fated flirtation with independence between 1996 and 1999. Sharia law then prevailed in areas of Chechnya that were presided over by field commanders positively disposed toward fundamentalist Islam. Public executions and floggings were common in these areas and sharia law was often invoked as a means of settling old scores. Advocates of sharia eventually came into conflict with the locals in these vicinities, some of whose customs, such as the veneration of Sufi saints, they deemed blasphemous. It is likely that peoples elsewhere in the region would prove equally as resistant to a legal code that implicitly questions important aspects of their cultural-religious heritage.

CONCLUSIONS: Just as DAAD served to distract potentially disruptive rank and file members of the

IRA from the implications of the incipient peace-process with the British government, adopting a hard-line stance against drug dealers and other social misanthropes allows the increasingly radical leadership of the North Caucasus’ insurgency to



deflect attention from the potentially less popular aspects of its ideological mandate. The rebels’ present focus on countering social phenomena like drug-taking is not rooted in philanthropy; rather, it has a clear political motivation: to remind and convince the region’s populace of the rebel movement’s social relevancy. In this context, it is interesting to note that in spite of the growing operational strength of the rebel movement in Ingushetia, the political instability in that republic last January took the form of a relatively spontaneous mass civil protest against President Zyazikov and the arbitrariness of the local law enforcement agencies. Few present seemed interested in agitating for a “Caucasian Emirate”.

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FIELD REPORTS

UNWELCOME CRISIS AHEAD OF GEORGIA'S ELECTIONS

Niklas Nilsson

A most unwelcome series of events have unfolded in the few weeks remaining until Georgia's Parliamentary Elections, scheduled for May 21. Russia has during April moved to reinforce its ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, allegedly downed a Georgian unmanned reconnaissance aircraft over Abkhazia, and demonstratively declared its intention to increase the manpower of its peacekeeping contingent in the region. As these developments are understood in Tbilisi as steps toward a Russian *de facto* annexation of its two breakaway regions, tensions in Georgian-Russian relations have increased commensurately over the last month.

Russia's aggressive actions against Georgia's breakaway regions pose a real and troubling threat to Georgia's national security and territorial integrity. These have likely thwarted most chances for the implementation of the unprecedentedly compromise-oriented peace plans for Abkhazia and South Ossetia presented by Tbilisi during March. Moreover, if Moscow continues to pursue its policy toward the breakaway regions in the manner it has envisioned, Tbilisi may well see itself as forced to respond in a way not precluding military action. Such a development could in a worst case scenario involve direct confrontation between Georgian and Russian forces, as the Russian MFA's special envoy for relations with CIS states on April 25 officially stated it will consider military action in the regions

in order to "protect Russian citizens", should Georgia seek to resolve the conflicts by force.

These developments obviously cast a dark shadow over the political climate in Georgia ahead of the Parliamentary Elections. Georgian politics remain as polarized as ever, and the fact that Georgia is forced to deal with a serious external threat while simultaneously managing the hitherto most contested Georgian elections ever impedes the prospects for a constructive pre-election climate, and significantly increases the risks also of domestic unrest. However, while the threat posed by Russia is considerable, all political sides are also likely to capitalize on the crisis for election purposes.

For President Saakashvili and the United National Movement, the crisis is not only the most severe challenge to Georgia's territorial integrity faced during its time in power; it also constitutes an opportunity for the President and the ruling party to retain their image as the country's responsible leaders. The government has sought to urge the opposition forces to return to the negotiating table, for discussions on other topics than the January Presidential Elections and reforms of the Election Code, which have been hotly contested during the spring. For this purpose, the President on April 23 offered opposition leaders a format for regular meetings on national security matters and Georgia's relationship with Russia.

The opposition, however, has refused to attend meetings with the President, whom they consider illegitimate due to alleged violations during the January 5 Presidential Election. Representatives of the nine-party opposition coalition have termed the invitation a mere PR stunt, intended to force the opposition into renewed negotiations. Furthermore, in spite of the Georgian government's apparent restraint in reacting to the crisis, representatives of the opposition coalition have accused the President of consciously fueling the crisis in order to gain public support ahead of the Elections, and that Mr. Saakashvili himself bears the responsibility both for Georgia's failure to gain a Membership Action Plan with NATO and the increasingly strained relationship with Russia.

Representatives of the small but loud Labor party, which is not part of the opposition coalition, went even further, stating that President Saakashvili and the UNM plan to thwart the Parliamentary Elections through launching a military campaign in

the conflict zones and that the only acceptable topic for negotiations was the President's resignation. The Republican Party has stated it would meet with the Parliamentary Chairperson or the Prime Minister for consultations on the topic; however meetings with the President himself are ruled out.

These reactions are clear manifestations of the polarization and lack of trust between the parties in Georgian politics. Indeed, recent events serve to drive the political factions further apart and further radicalize the political climate. The crisis will most likely be a key focus of Georgian politics ahead of the elections. This will impede the prospects for a constructive campaigning climate, as it further reduces the room for issue-based political debate and instead opens for militaristic rhetoric and mutual allegations of treason. Much of Georgia's international reputation depends on the conduct of the Parliamentary Elections of May 21, and the fact that these are to take place under severe Russian pressure does not help.

NEW TAJIK TAX CODE WORSENS SITUATION FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Sergey Medrea

New laws and amendments to the Tax Code of the Republic of Tajikistan will soon come into force, only to worsen the state of many tax payers. These will come as a surprise not only to entrepreneurs, but also to many authorities and tax agencies. However, this is common practice in Tajikistan, where important statutory acts are adopted without prior discussion with those to whom they are allotted. While high officials hold speeches on the need to improve the business climate, the new tax laws only add paperwork and costs to already heavy burdens for entrepreneurs.

Article 2, paragraph 2 of the amended Tax Code states that new laws and amendments to the Tax

Code can come into force one month after promulgation. Such short notices are harmful both to taxpayers, particularly in remote regions, and to tax authorities. They simply do not have time to familiarize themselves with and adapt to the amendments in the legislation. In fact, paragraph 4 of Article 2 makes things worse yet, by approving new tax laws to come into force at any given period of time, even sooner than one month after promulgation. This happened to the current amendments and laws to the Tax Code – they were passed on March 20th 2008 and were enforced on April 4th the same year. This gave the tax authorities, entrepreneurs and the general public 15 days to learn of and become accustomed with the

new laws. While there is a consensus that a lack of knowledge of laws does not exempt anyone from complying with them, such speedy and irresponsible enforcement of new laws makes it virtually impossible for even the most law-abiding citizens to comply with the rules.

By and large, 168 different norms have been amended in the new Tax Code of Tajikistan. Nowadays, depending on the nature of their entrepreneurial activity, taxpayers of the simplified taxation system will have to pay additional tax for using roads, ranging from 0.5 to 2 percent. The road tax is derived from total capital expenditures. However, if the gross expenditures do not exceed 70 percent of gross income, then the taxation base constitutes 70 percent of the gross income. Since the road tax depends on the expenditures rate, it becomes both costly and unfavorable to new businesses. Before reaping profits, businesses have to develop and a large amount of capital has to be invested, while the purchase of machinery may also be added to this. These expenditures add to gross expenditure and new entrepreneurs have to pay road tax. This creates fewer incentives for the establishment of new businesses and also dissuades older businesses from introducing innovations, because they now come with additional taxation. This is only one of many new taxes – overall, there are 20 types of different taxes, 16 of which are national and 4 local.

Local experts assess this will not help the maintenance of business in the country, but will complicate it. The main criticism is that the new tax code increases the rates and objects of taxation instead of expanding the taxation base. In other words, taxpayers now pay even more. This will only serve to discourage people from paying taxes, as it is sometimes cheaper to bribe tax inspectors or high officials than to pay taxes. These negative developments in the field of taxation are very

untimely. Due to the harsh winter and subsequent electricity shortages, many small-scale businesses went bankrupt or stopped working until sufficient electricity became available to run their enterprises. Many entrepreneurs are now struggling to restart their enterprises – nothing but encouragement should be given to persuade the latter to work. Instead, there is a new tax code, with more taxes to pay and shorter notices for compliance; and, finally, a legal frame of unpredictability, leaving entrepreneurs powerless to foresee how the law will react to business initiatives – and how long the law will remain in force before it changes again.

In his annual message to Parliament on April 25, President Emomali Rahmon proposed a moratorium on certain inspections for small-scale enterprises. He highlighted that “Elimination of administrative obstacles has a special meaning for development of small and medium scale enterprises.” He made several propositions, one of which was to assign the registration of small and medium scale businesses to regional taxation authorities. Aiming to support developing enterprises, Mr. Rahmon further proposed a two-year moratorium for all types of check-ups by taxation and other relevant authorities. Mr. Rahmon further highlighted that the prohibition of check-ups does not assume that entrepreneurs are free to engage in unlawful activities or abstain from paying taxes and other mandatory payments. Instead, it should serve as an incentive for entrepreneurs to invest in and develop enterprises. While abandoning taxation check-ups sounds rather ambitious, it can have many types of negative consequences for customers and the population in general. Instead, simplifying and polishing the existing Tax Code and taxation system can be a genuine step forward in encouraging the growth of enterprises.

AZERBAIJAN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SCANDAL WITH RUSSIA AND IRAN

Azer Karimov

On March 29, Azerbaijani customs officers at the Iranian-Azerbaijani border post at Astara confiscated a shipment on its way from Russia to Iran. The materials and equipment inside the containers were designated to be used in the construction of the nuclear power station in the Iranian city of Bushehr. Russian news agency "Interfax" reported that the customs officers refer to the prohibition by the senior leadership of the country as a reason for stopping the shipment. The same agency quoted an unnamed customs official in Russia saying that the incident will delay the construction of the "Bushehr" station.

The issue received large media attention in the subsequent weeks, with both Russian and Iranian officials pouring criticism and pressure on Azerbaijan to release the shipment. Azerbaijani customs officials responded by saying that the shipment was stopped because of a lack of necessary documentation. "This shipment and its content is considered a "special" category and by the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan, a special permission is required for the transit of such a shipment," the press service of the Azerbaijan State Customs Committee informed the APA News agency. The Russian agency "Atomstroyeksport" issued a counter-statement saying that the shipment was conducted in accordance with international practice.

The scandal took a diplomatic twist after Iranian officials threatened Azerbaijan, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan responded in a similar manner. "We do not understand the language of pressure or ultimatums," Azerbaijani deputy minister of foreign affairs Araz Azimov told journalists in Baku on April 29. "If the shipment is legal and all the papers are in order, then why is the Russian side not showing them to us?," Azimov rhetorically asked. He also informed the media that MFA officials will meet the Iranian ambassador in

Baku soon and try to sort out the issue in an atmosphere of dialogue and consensus. The ambassador himself tried to downplay the problem by saying that the shipment was halted only due to some technical procedures at Azerbaijani customs.

It is likely that the Azerbaijani side will release the shipment at some point. A continuous scandal with powerful neighbors to the north and south of the country is not in the interest of the Azerbaijani political leadership, especially in a year of presidential elections. Besides, Azerbaijan does not want to show itself as if it is acting on orders from the U.S.. Nuclear developments in Iran, and the world powers' attention to the issue, are well known in the country and because of the strong American opposition to the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, some might mistakenly construe the actions of the Azerbaijani government as if acting on orders from Washington. U.S. State Department officials have already denied any U.S. relation to this scandal.

Nevertheless, the incident has two interesting implications. First, Azerbaijan has showed itself a strong and self-reliant regional actor. Risking damaging its relations with Iran and Russia for the sake of international laws and regulations could only have been a dream ten years ago. It should be recalled that in the summer of 2001, Iranian jet fighters threatened force against Azerbaijani oil exploration vessels and subsequently systematically violated Azerbaijani air space, and that frightened official Baku, which had to call for Turkish political and military assistance to avoid a military conflict with Tehran. Today, the growing economic potential of Azerbaijan allows the country to act independently and to stand up for its national laws, even if this entails damage to relations with Iran or Russia.

On the other hand, Azerbaijan always seeks normal relations with officials in Moscow and Tehran because it understands the danger of having enemies on its borders. Bilateral economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance and a growing political dialogue with Iran have been a priority for President Ilham Aliyev in the past years. In this

context, the inflation of and attention given to the scandal over the shipment by Iranian and Russian media is remarkable. Many experts in Azerbaijan wonder if there are some powers who are interested in spoiling relations between Baku and Tehran. Deputy Minister Azimov cautioned those powers and said that “they will not achieve anything.”

UZBEKISTAN: CENTRAL ASIAN UNION DESTINED TO REMAIN ON PAPER

Erkin Akhmadov

President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov paid an official two-day visit to Kazakhstan on April 22-23. During the meeting, the sides discussed the issues of widening and deepening bilateral cooperation. The principal outcome of the visit was Uzbekistan's firm decision to abstain from joining or supporting regional organizations such as the Central Asian Union that has been promoted by the President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan for the last few years. In its place, Mr. Karimov proposed the establishment of a free trade area between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Mr. Nazarbaev openly welcomed this plan.

The much-discussed refusal of Uzbekistan to participate in any regional cooperation scheme was clarified by Mr. Karimov, “In order to establish a union between the states, their level of socioeconomic development and potential should be comparable.” Mr. Karimov's reasoning is quite rational as the five states of the region have very different political, economic and social prerequisites. For instance, the Central Asian states have adopted strikingly different approaches to economic development, with Kyrgyzstan embarking on the most ambitious economic liberalization reforms in the region and Turkmenistan proclaiming neutrality and isolationism. Of no less importance is the unequal distribution of the natural resources of the region that constitute a significant portion of Central Asia's export commodities.

It should be kept in mind, however, that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are members of regional organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Community and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The former includes Russia and Belarus, the latter Russia and China. Thus, an institutional framework of regional cooperation does, in effect, exist. However, the incentive for joining these organizations may not be to seek closer cooperation among the states of Central Asia, but rather at establishing better relations with their larger neighbors – Russia and China.

As for regional cooperation in Central Asia, it appears that Mr. Karimov is a greater proponent of bilateral agreements, as opposed to multilateral regional settlements. Thus, instead of creating a Central Asian Union based on the model of the EU, he proposed bilateral economic cooperation and the establishment of a free trade area between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Considering the fact that Kazakhstan is Uzbekistan's major trading partner, accounting for 8.4% of its foreign trade, the offer is consistent with the interests of both sides. The Presidents agreed to create a special working group headed by the Prime Ministers of the republics that will draft a document to create a free trade zone between the two nations. The main question now is how to unify customs and other duties and how to introduce various preferences –

something that could have been accomplished under Eurasian Economic Community integration initiative as well as under the Central Asian Economic Community that existed until 2001. In fact, the talks about establishing a free trade zone have been on the table for several years. Uzbekistan previously impeded the process by claiming that the project was unreasonable. As Uzbekistan initiated the project this time, Kazakh officials asserted that the free trade zone would be created on the basis of the equivalent agreement Kazakhstan has with China.

An independent local expert on economic issues, Tulegen Askarov, suggests that there are ample opportunities for increasing trade- and economic cooperation between the two states, particularly after Uzbekistan entered the phase of privatization and denationalization of the state economy. The establishment of a free trade area will reduce restrictions on currency operations, high customs duties and corruption, thus creating a business environment that is more attractive for foreign investment. Kazakh capital is currently concentrated in the cotton fiber production industry, construction materials and chemical industry.

Another speculative factor motivating Uzbekistan to seek closer economic cooperation with Kazakhstan concerns the ongoing global deficit of grains and flour. As the largest grain producer in the region, Kazakhstan announced earlier this month

that it will limit or completely close off all sales of grain and flour to the neighboring states in order to protect local consumers. Thus, for the neighboring states the price of grain and flour will rise substantially in the nearest future. Uzbekistan is in critical need of Kazakh grain deliveries, but under the free trade agreement, negotiations over the gain price could provide for a favorable treatment.

At the end of Mr. Karimov's visit, Mr. Nazarbaev expressed his intention to continue his efforts to create a four- or five sided consortium of Central Asian republics. Prior to the visit of Mr. Karimov, the President of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiev visited Astana and expressed his support for the creation of a Central Asian Union. In response to this, Mr. Karimov said, "Each country can decide on this issue, based on whether its people want this or not. There is no need to involve third countries."

The President of Uzbekistan is noticeably pre-cautious about sharing his political and economic powers with any supranational authority. He is also very conscious about the Uzbek state's interests and takes measures necessary to secure its favorable economic position. In light of such developments, if the free trade area project is effectively realized and concessions to the biggest trading partner are made, it is uncertain how much longer the need for a Central Asian Union will remain redundant for Uzbekistan.

NEWS DIGEST

KAZAKHSTAN PLANNING TO INTRODUCE EXPORT DUTY ON METALS

18 April

The Kazakh government will determine the size of an export duty that is to be introduced on mining and metals products before the end of April, Kazakh Deputy Finance Minister Daulet Yergozhin said in Astana on Friday. "An export duty on metal commodities is currently being calculated," he said, noting that the Kazakh Industry and Trade Ministry is handling the calculations. Yergozhin did not specify what types of metals products would be subject to the new export duty. The introduction of an export duty on metals will be considered in conjunction with other taxes, in particular, the corporate income tax, whose rate could be lowered once a new Tax Code is approved. Yergozhin said the export duty on metals commodities would be less than the oil export duty that is to come in effect on May 17. Nikolai Radostovets, executive director of Kazakhstan's Mining Metal Companies Association, said the companies view the introduction of the export duty as "a hindrance to the competitiveness of their products." "This is a barrier that will hinder the development of the Customs Union and could even contradict it," he said. A resolution on the customs duty on metals could be adopted at the President's Council of Economic Policy in a few days, he said. "We are ready to give more to the country, but within the framework of a civilized taxation system," Radostovets said. Industry and Trade Minister Vladimir Shkolnik called for a diversified approach to calculating the customs duty for each metal product. "There should be a balanced approach to each product. Obviously, there won't be a fixed 10% or 5% duty for all. We will discuss this issue further," he told journalists later today in Astana. (Interfax)

TAJIKISTAN LOOKING FOR NEW GRAIN SUPPLIERS

18 April

This year Tajikistan is planning to import up to 900,000 tons of grain, including wheat and flour, for internal needs and for refilling the national grain reserve, chief of the country's Customs Service Gurez Zaripov said on Friday. "In 2008 Tajikistan is planning to import 700,000 tons of flour and wheat, and another 200,000 tons will be purchased using budget money to refill the national reserve," he told a press conference. Tajikistan started looking for new grain suppliers after Kazakhstan banned its wheat exports for a period between April 26 to September 1, 2008, Zaripov said. Up to 98% of grains imported by Tajikistan were from Kazakhstan, he said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT ANNOUNCES EXEMPTION TO KAZAKH BAN ON WHEAT EXPORTS

18 April

President Kurmanbek Bakiev announced on April 18 that Kyrgyzstan will be exempt from a recent Kazakh decision to ban wheat exports. Speaking to reporters en route to Bishkek following a state visit to Kazakhstan, Bakiev said that Kazakh officials agreed to honor the terms of a prior contract to sell Kyrgyzstan 50,000 tons of wheat and added that Kyrgyzstan will receive a total of 300,000 tons of wheat from Kazakhstan by the end of the year. Although Kazakhstan is the world's fifth-largest exporter of grain, it recently imposed a ban on wheat exports in order to "ensure food security in the country" and to protect the domestic Kazakh market from expectations that international prices for wheat, flour, and other agricultural products will continue to increase. Bakiev also revealed on April 18 that the two countries agreed during his visit to a new deal whereby Kazakhstan will supply crude oil to a refinery in the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalal-

Abad. He added that Kazakh President Nazarbaev agreed to harmonize visa regulations by extending a new 90-day period for Kyrgyz visitors to legally stay in Kazakhstan without formal registration. (AKIpress)

KYRGYZ POLICE LAUNCH INVESTIGATION OF SHOOTING DEATH OF RUSSIAN SOLDIER

20 April

The Kyrgyz Interior Ministry announced that police launched an investigation on April 20 into the early-morning attack on a group of Russian servicemen that resulted in the shooting death of a soldier stationed at the Russian airbase at Kant, outside of Bishkek. According to the ministry, a car carrying the servicemen failed to stop at a highway checkpoint manned by traffic policemen, prompting the police to fire a warning shot before then shooting at the vehicle. A preliminary investigation determined that the Russian was fatally wounded by the second shot. That account was disputed by the Russian Embassy in Bishkek, however, which contended that the car carrying the Russian servicemen was stopped in the town of Kant by people dressed in police uniform, but who were traveling in a car with no number plate and produced no official identification. The embassy added that while detaining the Russian servicemen, the uniformed men forced the servicemen to the ground and then opened fire without cause. (Itar-Tass)

KAZAKH PREMIER UNVEILS NEW CIVIL SERVICE REFORM PROGRAM

21 April

During the opening of a special training course in Astana for senior civil servants, Prime Minister Karim Masimov unveiled on April 21 a new civil-service reform program. He explained that the plan was formulated to meet the "need to develop a new personnel policy and new approaches aimed at developing professional managers," and that it will also introduce electronic, web-based "e-government" service to the population to "simplify administrative procedures and shorten the time of rendering civil services." He added that the "main aim of the administrative reforms" is to increase the "competitiveness of the country's economy," and would be supplemented by measures to improve the quality of government services, the introduction of "efficient result-oriented government planning and

budgeting," and the reduction of state "intervention in the private sector." (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

EMBATTLED CHECHEN COMMANDER AFFIRMS LOYALTY TO PUTIN

21 April

Sulim Yamadayev, the commander of the Vostok battalion that Chechen officials want disbanded, told Ekho Moskvu in an interview on April 18 that he reports to the commander in chief of the Russian armed forces, President Putin, not to Chechen Republic head Ramzan Kadyrov. At least two members of Vostok, which is affiliated with the Russian Defense Ministry's 42nd Motorized Rifle Division and directly subordinate to Russian military intelligence, were reported killed in two separate standoffs on April 13 and 14 with members of Kadyrov's bodyguard. In the same interview, Yamadayev accused Kadyrov of deliberately misrepresenting the situation in Chechnya. He further claimed that 75 percent of the Chechen police are amnestied former resistance fighters. "Kommersant" reported on April 21 that some 300 members of Vostok (of a total strength of 1,000) have gone over to Kadyrov's side; Kadyrov was quoted by kavkaz-uzel.ru on April 19 as promising alternative employment to any who do so. (RFE/RL)

UZBEK PRESIDENT BEGINS STATE VISIT TO KAZAKHSTAN

22 April

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev welcomed his Uzbek counterpart Islam Karimov on April 22 to Astana on the first day of an official state visit to Kazakhstan. After Nazarbaev welcomed Karimov at the airport, they discussed issues ranging from bilateral relations to regional security. The two leaders agreed to improve the coordination of efforts to combat terrorism and drug trafficking, jointly pledging that "we are very much interested in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, since extremism, drug trafficking, and other challenges originate there." Speaking to reporters following the meeting, Karimov hailed Kazakhstan as Uzbekistan's "key partner" in the region and said that it "can play a decisive role in resolving many fundamental issues" essential for stability and security in Central Asia, including support for "sustainable development" in the region. But Karimov also argued that Uzbekistan is "in a better position than Kazakhstan for doing business," claiming that "small-sized business constitutes 49

percent of Uzbek GDP," Kazakhstan Today reported. Karimov also announced that he is opposed to the proposal to form a union of Central Asian states, a Kazakh initiative recently raised during the visit to Kazakhstan by Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who expressed his support for the idea. The proposal encompasses the formation of an "economic union" based on regional coordination of economic development and energy resources. Both presidents did agree, however, on a plan to develop a free-trade zone, ordering Kazakh and Uzbek officials to prepare for more specific negotiations in the coming months, Kazinform reported. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

RUSSIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY POSTPONES RULING ON CONTROVERSIAL CHECHEN BATTALION

22 April

Meeting in Moscow on April 18, senior Defense Ministry officials decided to postpone until after the May 7 inauguration of President-elect Medvedev any decision on the future of the Vostok battalion headed by Hero of Russia Sulim Yamadayev. Following incidents on April 13 and 14 in Gudermes involving members of Vostok and of Chechen Republic head Ramzan Kadyrov's bodyguard, Kadyrov personally accused Yamadayev and his brothers of crimes against the civilian population, and the Chechen parliament adopted an appeal to Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and to outgoing President Putin in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the armed forces either to disband Vostok or to replace Yamadayev as its commander. Kavkaz-uzel.ru on April 21 quoted Kadyrov as saying that 343 servicemen have resigned "voluntarily" from Vostok, but he denied that they have been offered alternative employment in the police force or security bodies. Kadyrov stressed that he has no personal grievance against rank-and-file Vostok members, but that he considers it imperative to apprehend "individual criminals" serving in its ranks. Meanwhile, some 160 weapons confiscated from Vostok members last week are being subjected to a ballistic examination. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIA TO STEP UP "GENOCIDE" RECOGNITION DRIVE

24 April

Armenia's new president said on Thursday he will seek "historic justice" for 1.5 million ethnic

Armenians killed by Ottoman Turks, claimed as a genocide by Yerevan and which still affects relations with Turkey. Turkey strongly denies Armenian claims, backed by many Western historians, that the massacres of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War One amounted to a systematic genocide. The issue has evolved into a source of tension that has complicated Ankara's relations with the United States and the European Union, which Turkey is seeking to join. President Serzh Sargsyan, who was sworn into office this month, said in a speech to mark Armenia's annual Genocide Day that securing international condemnation of the killings nearly a century ago would be a priority for his administration. "As a result of the genocide that was planned and carried out by the state in Ottoman Turkey, a vast number of Armenians were annihilated on their native land and lost their living space," Sargsyan said in a statement. "International recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide is an appropriate and inevitable part of Armenia's foreign policy agenda," he said in the statement. "The Motherland of all Armenians, the Republic of Armenia, should redouble its efforts for the restoration of historic justice." Armenia insists the killings should be declared a genocide and the massacres have been recognised as such by some Western lawmakers. But Ankara says large numbers of both Christian Armenians and Muslim Turks were killed during the violent and chaotic break-up of the Ottoman Empire. A law in Turkey makes it criminal offence to call the killings a genocide. Armenia and its neighbour Turkey have no diplomatic links, although Turkish President Abdullah Gul this month sent a letter to Yerevan calling for dialogue to normalise ties. Turkey has kept its land border with Armenia closed since the early 1990s in protest at Yerevan's occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh, a slice of territory belonging to ally Azerbaijan which is populated by ethnic Armenians. Turkey also objects to Yerevan's claims on some of its land. (Reuters)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT ORDERS REVERSAL OF PREDECESSOR'S CALENDAR CHANGES

24 April

At a cabinet meeting in Ashgabat, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov on April 23 ordered the reversal of his predecessor's official changes to the calendar, Turkmen Television. The order effectively restores the previous names of the

months and days of the calendar, reverting to the traditional Turkmen-language translation of the months and days used prior to late President Saparmurat Niyazov's decision to rename days and months after himself and his family members. Berdymukhammedov explained that the order was related to his recent announcement of a new special commission to draft a "new edition" of the constitution, which he said will be ready by September. (RFE/RL)

FRANCE GRANTS ASYLUM TO FORMER GEORGIAN DEFENSE MINISTER

24 April

The French authorities have acceded to a request by former Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili for political asylum, Okruashvili's lawyer Eka Basilia told journalists in Tbilisi on April 23. Okruashvili left Georgia for Germany last October following his televised retraction of damaging allegations against President Saakashvili. Germany declined to extradite him to Georgia but allowed him to travel to France, where he requested asylum. A Tbilisi court sentenced him in absentia last month to 11 years' imprisonment on charges, which he claims were fabricated, of large-scale extortion. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT CRITICIZES JUDGES, JUDICIAL OFFICIALS FOR UNETHICAL CONDUCT

25 April

In an address to the sixth annual congress of judges in Bishkek, Kyrgyz President Bakiev criticized on April 25 judges and judicial officials for "unethical behavior," which he said is "unacceptable, no matter whether it is in a courtroom or other places outside the court." He noted "a large number of complaints about judges' actions," and added that some legislators are equally guilty of poor behavior. Bakiev then reminded his audience -- consisting largely of senior judges, members of the government and the parliament, governors, and the heads of district-level government -- that "the main point of judicial reform is to raise judges' legal awareness," adding that judges "needed to raise their status and to strengthen public confidence in courts." (AKIpress)

TURKMENISTAN REACHES GAS-PRICE AGREEMENT WITH IRAN

25 April

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov met on April 25 in Ashgabat with Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Seyyed Reza Kasaizadeh and concluded talks over resuming Turkmen natural-gas exports to Iran. Kasaizadeh, who also serves as the director of the Iranian national gas company, agreed to new higher prices for Turkmen gas and said that lower-level negotiations would determine an acceptable price. Turkmenistan is a key gas supplier for Iran, utilizing the Korpeje-Kord-Koy gas pipeline, but cut off exports to Iran in December 2007, citing pipeline problems. Some unidentified Turkmen officials admitted that the halt in exports stemmed from displeasure over the low price paid by Iran, however. (AFP)

ARMENIA MARKS GENOCIDE ANNIVERSARY

25 April

Hundreds of thousands of Armenians marched in silence on April 24 to the Tsitsernakaberd memorial outside Yerevan to pay their respects to the estimated 1.5 million Armenians massacred in Ottoman Turkey during the first two decades of the 20th century, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. In a statement marking the 93rd anniversary of the arrest in Constantinople of hundreds of Armenian intellectuals that marked the beginning of the wave of mass killings, President Serzh Sarkisian termed them "a crime against humanity," but stressed at the same time that Armenia seeks only recognition and condemnation of the genocide, but not "vengeance and enmity." As in an editorial published in "The Wall Street Journal" in December 2006, and during his visit to the United States in October 2007, Sarkisian again affirmed that Armenia is ready to normalize relations with Turkey without preconditions. In Moscow on April 24, police prevented Armenians from staging a protest outside the Turkish Embassy to mark the anniversary. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA CALLS FOR INVESTIGATION OF GEORGIAN PRIME MINISTER'S DEATH

26 April

Russian Ambassador for Special Assignments Kenyaikin has called on PACE to investigate the circumstances of the death in 2005 of then Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania. Zhvania and a friend were found dead in a rented apartment; the Georgian authorities immediately gave the cause of death as natural gas poisoning, but Zhvania's family

subsequently questioned that verdict, suggesting he may have been murdered. The Russian delegation to PACE three months ago proposed establishing a commission to investigate Zhvania's death, but PACE Secretary-General Terry Davis rejected that call at the time as "pointless." (Caucasus Press)

KAZAKH CITY RESIDENTS RALLY TO PROTEST MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT

28 April

A group of roughly 2,000 Almaty residents rallied on April 26 to protest the city's municipal-development plan, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reported. The demonstrators accused the Kazakh government of "failing to protect its citizens" after a number of private homes were demolished by city authorities to make room for new development. There has also been a sharp rise in urban land and property prices in Almaty, which has led some local officials to attempt to force many middle- and lower-class residents from their homes in order to make way for the construction of high-end building projects. Demonstrators also appealed to President Nursultan Nazarbaev to intervene directly to resolve the issue. (RFE/RL)

IRAN DEMANDS AZERBAIJAN RELEASE RUSSIAN NUCLEAR SHIPMENT

28 April

Iran demanded Sunday that Azerbaijan deliver a Russian shipment of nuclear equipment blocked at its border with Iran for the past three weeks. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said in his weekly briefing that his country has asked the Azerbaijani ambassador in Iran to get his government "to deliver the shipment as soon as possible." The blocked nuclear equipment "is in the framework of Iran-Russia cooperation" and there should be "no ban on it," he said about the shipment destined for a Russian-built nuclear reactor in the southern Iranian port city of Bushehr. Azerbaijan has said it was seeking more information about the shipment due to fears that it might violate any of the three sets of U.N. Security Council sanctions imposed on Iran over its failure to halt uranium enrichment. On Monday, Russian state-run company Atomstroieksport said that one or two trucks carrying the equipment for Iran were stopped two weeks ago at the town of Astara, on the Azerbaijani-Iranian border. Company spokeswoman Irina Yesipova said officials were holding talks with both Azerbaijan and Iran about the incident. She said the shipment contained "heat-

isolating equipment" essential to the plant's operation but that the holdup was not likely to delay the startup of the plant. Iran is paying Russia more than \$1 billion to build the light-water reactor at Bushehr. Construction has been held up in recent months by disputes between Tehran and Moscow over payments and a schedule for shipping nuclear fuel. Russia delivered the final shipment of uranium fuel in January, and Tehran has said it was hoping the plant would begin operations by summer. The United States initially opposed Russia's building Bushehr, but later softened its position after Iran agreed to return spent nuclear fuel to Russia to ensure it does not extract plutonium from it that could be used to make atomic bombs. Washington and Moscow have also said the Russian nuclear fuel supply means Iran no longer needs to continue its uranium enrichment program — a process that can provide fuel for a reactor or fissile material for a bomb. (AP)

GEORGIA WILL COMPLAIN TO NATO ABOUT RUSSIA'S ACTIONS

28 April

Special envoy of the Georgian president and former foreign minister David Bakradze left for Brussels Monday morning for a 26+1 meeting (26 member-states plus Georgia) at NATO headquarters convened at Georgia's request. "We continue our diplomatic efforts connected with Russia's latest decisions and actions. We will inform representatives of all NATO member-states about Russia's destructive moves in conflict zones at the 26+1 meeting convened at Georgia's request," Bakradze told the press at Tbilisi airport. In his opinion, the session at the NATO headquarters will be effective and "all the grievances of the Georgian side will be taken into account" at the Wednesday session of the Russia-NATO Council. Georgia is dissatisfied with Russia's recent actions to establish direct contacts with breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia and also the downing of a Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle by a Russian fighter on April 20. (Interfax)

RUSSIA DOES NOT SEEK CONTROL OVER ABKHAZIA, SOUTH OSSETIA - RUSSIAN FM

29 April

Russia's moves to protect the rights and interests of Abkhaz and South Ossetian residents are not aimed at securing control over the breakaway republics. "It is Absolutely apparent, that Russia's moves are

aimed at ensuring basic rights of Abkhaz and South Ossetia residents, rather than gaining any kind of control over the territories of the breakaway republics," the Russian Foreign Ministry's Information and Press Department said in a statement on Tuesday. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJAN BLOCKS RUSSIAN NUKE SHIPMENT TO IRAN

29 April

Iran has reported that a shipment of Russian nuclear equipment was being held in neighboring Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan, an ally of the United States, has acknowledged the delay. The Azeri government said it has sought to determine whether the nuclear shipment violated United Nations Security Council sanctions on Iran. Iranian officials said their Foreign Ministry has demanded that Azeri authorities release the nuclear equipment, Middle East Newline reported. They said the equipment, intended for the Bushehr nuclear energy reactor, was held up at the Iranian-Azeri border. "We have asked them to deliver the shipment as soon as possible," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammed Ali Hussein said. Ali Hussein did not identify the nuclear equipment held in Azerbaijan. The spokesman said the nuclear shipment has been in Azerbaijan for three weeks. Atomstroiexport spokeswoman Irina Yesipova said the trucks contained what she termed heat-isolating systems. Ms. Yesipova said she did not envision additional delays to Bushehr. Iran has also reported the construction of a second nuclear reactor. Officials said the facility was being built along the Iranian border with Iraq and would have a capacity of 360 megawatts. "Now we need to think about the fuel for it," Iranian ambassador to Russia, Gholamreza Ansari, said. (World Tribune)

EU SUSPENDS SANCTIONS AGAINST UZBEKISTAN FOR FURTHER SIX MONTHS

29 April

European Union foreign ministers agreed Tuesday to suspend sanctions against Uzbekistan for a further six months, despite criticisms from human rights groups. Ministers initially suspended a

European visa ban on Uzbek leaders back in October after receiving "positive signals" from the regime, although an arms embargo imposed last year remains active. The sanctions were originally imposed after Uzbekistan rejected demands for an international probe into the lethal repression of an uprising in its Andijan province in 2005, which left up to 1,000 dead according to human rights groups. On Tuesday, the 27 E.U. foreign ministers welcomed the release by Uzbek authorities of four human rights activists in February, an agreement allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross to resume visits to prisons there, and the recent abolition of the death penalty. The ministers said in a statement during a meeting in Luxembourg that the suspension of sanctions would continue for another six months "with a view to encouraging the Uzbek authorities to take substantive steps to improve the human rights situation and taking into account their commitments." However with human rights groups calling for a tougher line, the ministers agreed to review the decision in three months, adding that they remain "seriously concerned about the situation of human rights and the rule of law in a number of areas in Uzbekistan." "The E.U. cannot forget why it imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan in the first place to push for an independent investigation of the killing of hundreds of people protesting against the government," said Natalia Alonso, deputy director at Amnesty International's E.U. office ahead of the meeting. "Three years on, the families of the Andijan victims are still waiting for justice," she added. Amnesty International has said the E.U. foreign ministers are sending the wrong message, "that Uzbekistan can continue to ignore calls for an independent investigation with total impunity." Human Rights Watch echoed the call for sanctions arguing that Uzbekistan's "recent grudging steps to better its dreadful human rights record are a direct result of E.U. pressure generated by the sanctions." (AFP)