

SECURITY CHALLENGES IN CENTRAL ASIA RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PUBLICATIONS CONTENTS DIGEST

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We hereby present the twelfth issue of the Russian and Persian language publication digest on regional security challenges in Central Asia.

This issue focusses upon several important events, some of which are already fundamentally changing the situation in Central Asia. These are: the incipient transit of power process in Kazakhstan, and its impact on the country's internal balance of power and economy, as well as wider regional impacts; the resuming sales of Turkmen gas to Gazprom; the Russian language future in Tajikistan; Kazakhstan's new proposals regarding the Road and Belt initiative; and the construction delay of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad.

In the next issues of our digest we will continue reviewing the above-mentioned topics, as well as other regional challenges covered by targeted foreign media. The views and opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the position of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation.

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Tokayev, a Pigeon, Not a Hawk

*Sanat Urnaliev,
Radio "Azattiq" Correspondent (Kazakhstan)*

Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed the nomination of Kassym-Jomart Tokayev as the presidential candidate from the ruling party, "Nur Otan". This increases his chances of winning the elections to be held on June 9, 2019. Most experts believe that Tokayev will be highly dependent upon Nazarbayev for his political future.

According to Dosym Satpayev, Director of the Risk Assessment Group, even if Tokayev is elected president with a five-year mandate, the situation in the country will not change dramatically. Nazarbayev's family may create a security ring around Tokayev to control him. Dariga Nazarbayeva, Nazarbayev's daughter, will most likely remain the Senate speaker after the elections. As per the Constitution, it is the Senate that approves the appointment of the Prosecutor General and the head of the National Security Committee (NSC). Currently, Nazarbayev's nephew, Samat Abish, is the NSC deputy chairman.

Tolganai Umbetalieva, Director of the Central Asian Foundation for Developing Democracy, considers Tokayev to be a "loyal political figure" who is not involved in major corruption scandals. He notes that Tokayev is not the best candidate, but that the authorities now need someone who will protect Nursultan Nazarbayev's interests to the greatest extent. From this point of view, Tokayev is probably the best available option.

Political analyst Andrei Chebotarev, Director of the Centre for Contemporary Research "Alternativa", considers the "Nur Otan" candidate to be a "compromise figure", albeit one who has always been loyal to

Nursultan Nazarbayev. Chebotaryev opines that the new president will probably strengthen the professionalisation of Kazakh foreign policy, put greater emphasis on upholding national interests and maintaining a multi-vector approach. In domestic policy one can hardly expect a “thaw” from the current approach, but at the same time there will not be any tough actions, because Tokayev is regarded as a “pigeon”, not a “hawk”.

<https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-nur-otan-tokayev-nazarbaev/29898497.html>

Kazakhstan’s Most Likely Future Scenario

*Marat Shibutov,
Editor of Regnum News Agency (Russia)*

According to Marat Shibutov, one should not expect that the transfer of power in Kazakhstan will lead to greater liberalisation, or to a more favourable political ambience for the opposition. Additionally, confrontation between Nazarbayev and Tokayev is highly unlikely. Those who try to instigate this will fail. Shibutov cites the cautionary tale of certain Russian politicians who, after Dmitry Medvedev was elected president, attempted to persuade him to start a confrontation with Vladimir Putin, and found themselves politically sidelined as a result. Shibutov emphasises that the transfer of power in Kazakhstan is neither for the population’s benefit, nor for that of the elite; it is, instead, aimed at foreign partners and with a view to solving problems of state administration. As such, for some, the transit of power will change a great deal, but for others, everything will remain as it was before.

<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2597306.html>

The Economic Aspect of the Presidential Election in Kazakhstan

*Yuri Masanov,
Journalist (Kazakhstan)*

According to analysts from “Ranking.kz”, a project tasked with the monitoring of the Kazakh economy, Kazakhstan’s long-term international investment attractiveness will directly depend on the outcome of the presidential election, and on the winning candidate’s future policy. Political analyst Aidos Sarym deems that domestic and foreign business are now waiting for either the prolongation of the old rules of the game, or the appearance of clear new ones. The uncertainty element has led to a two-fold drop in domestic investment, as compared to last year.

Financial analyst, Arman Beysembayev, at FXPrimus, a broker company, points to a direct link between political uncertainty and the situation in the Kazakh foreign exchange and securities markets. On the day when President Nazarbayev announced his resignation, the national currency rate rose to 395 Tenge per USD, and Kazakh bond prices fell by 3-5% on average. However, the initial panic ended when the new head of

state, Kasym-Jomart Tokayev, was introduced. Nonetheless, in the medium-term, uncertainty remains.

According to Beysembaev, such factors as the presidential team's future actions and decisions, the change in the domestic balance of power, and the redistribution of economic resources among interest groups will be crucial for Kazakhstan's economic development in the next three-to-five years. He considers that the new presidential team will also have to change the drivers of economic growth so as to successfully surmount Kazakhstan's persistent economic problems. Otherwise, Beysembaev notes, the stagnation, which has been observed since 2012, will continue, and the economy will gradually degrade.

<https://ia-centr.ru/experts/yuriy-masanov/ekonomicheskiy-aspekt-prezidentskikh-vyborov-v-kazahstane-mogla-neuverennost-investorov-stat-odnoy/>

Will Gazprom help Ashgabat to Cope with the Economic Crisis?

*Tatyana Zverintseva,
Journalist, Fergana Agency (Russia)*

In April, Gazprom resumed the purchase of natural gas from Turkmenistan, which had been discontinued in 2016. So far, the Russian company reports only its readiness to purchase 1.155 billion cubic metres by June 30. It is supposed that Gazprom may buy about five billion cubic metres by the end of this year. For purposes of comparison, until 2009, Gazprom bought up to 40 billion cubic metres of Turkmen gas per year. Zverintseva considers that Russia does not in fact need Turkmen gas, since it produced 733 billion cubic metres of its own gas in 2018. In view of this consideration, Moscow is most likely pursuing other goals.

This may be the desire to intercept a part of gas – and thereby also political and economic influence – from China, which in 2018 bought 47 billion cubic metres of gas from Turkmenistan. It could also be an intention to prevent the construction of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline by depriving it of gas. Another reason could be the provision of “humanitarian aid” to the Turkmen people.

From Ashgabat's point of view, the resumption of gas supplies to Russia can be seen as a success for Turkmen gas diplomacy. Ashgabat is also pushing ahead with other gas-related negotiations. Reportedly, Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, is to visit the country in the near future to talk with Berdimuhamedov about the Iranian gas debts, which in 2017 caused the discontinuation of bilateral energy cooperation. If Ashgabat manages to come to an agreement with Tehran on the settlement of debt and establishment of lower prices for its gas, then it will have three large gas buyers. This will enable Ashgabat to increase gas revenues and palliate economic difficulties, unless Ashgabat again wastes money on image-building and international events.

<https://fergana.agency/articles/106852/>

Tokayev Received Tashkent's support

*Victoria Panfilova,
Journalist, "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" (Russia)*

Tokayev's first state visit to Uzbekistan and his meeting with Shavkat Mirziyoyev attracted the attention of Central Asian and Russian experts, including in terms of assessing the prospects for regional integration. Chief Researcher at the Institute of Market Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Nabi Ziyadullayev, considers that the state visit to Uzbekistan has strengthened the status of Tokayev – not only in Kazakhstan, but also in the Central Asian region as a whole. He notes that following the talks between the two presidents, the Nur-Sultan (formerly Astana) – Tashkent axis has been established. Ziyadullayev stresses that over the past two years, bilateral relations have been developing steadily, and Tashkent and Nur-Sultan have managed to successfully resolve a number of issues, thus forming the basis for regional integration. The Russian expert points out that while the power transition period continues in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan will assume regional leadership.

According to the Deputy Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan, Sanat Kushkumbayev, "Uzbekistan is not just a regional neighbour, but the largest partner country for Nur-Sultan in a regional context and Uzbek-Kazakh bilateral cooperation serves the engine for regional collaboration." These factors ultimately predetermined the destination of Tokayev's first state visit. Kushkumbayev noted, however, that despite the Kazakh-Uzbek agreements reached, it was still premature to talk about Central Asian integration.

http://www.ng.ru/cis/2019-04-15/5_7557_support.html

Persian Association proposes to Dushanbe: abandon Cyrillic and Russian, rename Tajik to Farsi

*Center for Geopolitical Studies
"Berlek-Unity"(Republic of Bashkortostan, Russia)*

The Persian Association, uniting Persian-speaking scholars and intellectuals from various countries, made a proposal to Tajikistan's President, Emomali Rahmon, and Parliament to ditch the Cyrillic alphabet and Russian language within the republic, as well as to rename the Tajik language to Farsi. This step, in their opinion, would help to save the Persian language in this space, and would give the citizens of Tajikistan access to scientific works and classical Persian literature.

The indirect response to this proposal can be inferred from a statement by Emomali Rahmon, made after the Tajik-Russian summit talks on April 17, 2019. Rahmon stressed that the Russian information space was accessible throughout Tajikistan, and that it was part of the Tajik information field. He also highlighted the strengthening of Russian education within Tajikistan, and of Russian language positions due to the

contributions made by Russian philology and literature faculties in ten local universities; the Russian-Tajik (Slavonic) University and branches of such leading Russian universities as Moscow State University, the National University of Science and Technology, and the Moscow Power Engineering Institute.

President Rahmon stressed that compulsory study of the Russian language in General Education Institutions was established in Tajikistan from the second grade. In addition, in many pre-school institutions, education is conducted in Russian. The President also thanked Moscow for its willingness to speed up the construction of five new Russian-language schools in Tajikistan.

<http://berlek-nkp.com/tadzhikistan/7496-v-tadzhikistane-ukreplyayutsya-pozicii-rossiyskogo-obrazovaniya-i-russkogo-yazyka-rahmon.html>

New 3D Reality proposed by Nazarbayev

International News Agency "KazInform" (Kazakhstan)

At the second Belt and Road forum, Nursultan Nazarbayev voiced his vision for solving contemporary international geopolitical and economic problems, as well as promoting closer partnership in Eurasia. In his opinion, this can be done on the basis of "Three Dialogues" (3D). The first envisages a dialogue between the United States, Russia, China and the European Union. The second should be aimed at uniting the potentials of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the interests of Eurasia. The third dialogue should focus upon a systematic economic dialogue between the Eurasian Economic Union, the European Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. According to Nazarbayev, the development of economic cooperation in such a format would give a powerful impetus to the growth and diversification of Eurasian economies, improving their business climate and investment attractiveness. The launch of 3D, Nazarbayev believes, may be essential to form a system of interconnections in Greater Eurasia, and thereby enhance its global role.

https://www.inform.kz/ru/nursultan-nazarbaev-predlozhit-novuyu-geopoliticheskuyu-real-nost-tri-d_a3521292

Why the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railroad Still Hasn't Been Built

Sinologist Aybolot Aydosov (Kyrgyzstan)

The participants of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad project have not yet begun its construction. At the same time, the official information about the real causes behind this delay continue undisclosed. Aybolot Aydosov assumes that the main reasons for the delay are disputes over the width of the railway gauge and the lack of funds in

Kyrgyzstan. He believes that China has offered Bishkek official loans in exchange for natural resources, but that the former president, Almazbek Atambayev, has refused this idea. Atambayev has purportedly counter-offered that, in exchange for building the railway, the Chinese side may use it for free. That is, Kyrgyzstan will not take rent for Chinese goods passing through Kyrgyzstan during the repayment period.

Aydosov deems that the project will not be beneficial to Bishkek in the near future, since Kyrgyzstan doesn't produce sufficient export-oriented industrial goods. In addition, the railroad may lead to a surge in the supply of Chinese goods, further increasing Kyrgyzstan's dependency on imports, which exceed its exports at a steadily growing pace.

<https://ia-centr.ru/experts/aybolot-aydosov/zheleznodorozhnyy-poyas-i-put-pochemu-do-sikh-por-ne-stroitsya-koleya-kitay-kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan/>