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CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

Journal of Social and Political Studies

5 (47)
2007

CA&CC Press[®]
SWEDEN

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FOUNDED AND PUBLISHED BY

INSTITUTE
FOR CENTRAL ASIAN AND
CAUCASIAN STUDIES

Registration number: 620720-0459
State Administration for
Patents and Registration of Sweden

INSTITUTE OF
STRATEGIC STUDIES OF
THE CAUCASUS

Registration number: M-770
Ministry of Justice of
Azerbaijan Republic

PUBLISHING HOUSE

CA&CC Press®. SWEDEN

Registration number: 556699-5964

Journal registration number: 23 614
State Administration for Patents and Registration of Sweden

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WEB ADDRESS:
<http://www.ca-c.org>

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CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS
Journal of Social and Political Studies
No. 5(47), 2007

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ELECTIONS AND POWER

**ON THE RESULTS OF
THE SPECIAL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
IN KAZAKHSTAN**

Timur SHAYMERGENOV

*Coworker at the Secretariat of the Majilis of
the Kazakhstan Parliament
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

The current political season will certainly occupy a special place in Kazakhstan's most recent history. It is no exaggeration to say that the political reform going on in the country is a symbolic event that has significantly changed the political arena and configuration of forces in the republic. This process was launched in May when amendments to the country's Constitution called upon to bring the economic and political development processes in Kazakhstan into harmony with each other were adopted. They were primarily aimed at introducing a presidential-parliamentary form of rule in the country. The president's deliberate transfer of some powers to the political parties and the parliament was not only a sign of the constructive development of the political system, but also a strategically tested step that greatly accelerated political modernization in Kazakhstan.

The change in the parliament's status and possibilities led to disbandment of the lower house and the decision to hold special elections to the Majilis on 18 August, 2007.¹ Analysts give a variety of reasons why the deputy corps of the third convocation became a thing of the past, but this step seems very logical, since it was dictated by the amendments to the Constitution, and they, in turn, were a demand of the times. There are no other clear reasons for the disbandment, since the Majilis' activity was not criticized in the government or society, and the house operated quite efficiently. This step

¹ See: Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbaev No. 350 "About Dissolution of the Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan of the Third Convocation and Appointment of Extraordinary Elections of the Deputies of Majilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan," Akorda, Astana, 20 June, 2007, available at [http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=153,1&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL].

also meets the interests of Kazakhstan's democratic development and the tasks of the country's accelerated modernization.

Elections according to the proportional system held for the first time in Kazakhstan's history were not only an innovation for all the political forces and society as a whole, but were also a test of the party system's maturity. Few had any idea what a political party's tactics, or its relations with the republic's elite, should be in the new situation. For the first time, a list of leaders had to be compiled, which was offered to the voters as the party's overall image. Public opinion polls acquired an entirely different nature, and the fervor aroused by the party ratings on a national scale was one of the most entertaining elements of the past election marathon.²

In so doing, many experts christened them "no-intrigue elections" even before the actual campaign began, since the favorite and the results were known in advance. The results surprised everyone and gave rise to all kinds of different assessments. But all the same, despite all the ambiguity and unexpectedness of the election results, political reform in Kazakhstan is an important and long-term step, for the country has in fact transferred from one system to another—from the ex-Soviet Kazakh S.S.R. and a post-Soviet new formation with unclear legitimacy to a systemic national state.³ The past election campaign was a logical continuation of this reform. The government gave society another clear signal that it was steering a steady course toward democratization of the country and that political modernization would not be halted or conserved.

* * *

It should be noted that certain merging and transformation processes preceded the elections on the republic's party field, which were mainly triggered by the party nature of the electoral procedure. Seven political structures took part in the 2007 parliamentary elections: the National Social-Democratic Party (NSDP), the Nur Otan People's Democratic Party, the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan (PPK), the Auyt Social-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Rukhaniyat Party, and the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK).⁴

One of the favorites in the election campaign was the leading party—the Nur Otan People's Democratic Party—which poses as the party in power. Its program focuses on support of the president's political-economic policy.

Another favorite was the National Social-Democratic Party, which was joined a little earlier by the Real Ak Zhol Party. The NSDP posed as the main opponent of Nur Otan and the government as a whole. It presented its goals as promoting a cardinal change in the republic's political and socio-economic policy, as well as dismantling the current system of state rule.

The leaders also included the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, to which representatives of the Adilet Democratic Party of Kazakhstan belonged. Ak Zhol, being a representative of the so-called "moderate" opposition, generally steered a constructive course, offering in so doing their own vision of the change in the country's development vector. Objectively, the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan, the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan, Auyt, and Rukhaniyat were labeled as outsiders. The popularity ratings of these parties are not high in society, and their activity is ineffective and barely tangible (this particularly concerns work in the regions). For these reasons, experts did not regard these players as potential victors.

² See: S. Akimbekov, "Goriachee leto?" *Kontinent*, No. 13 (198), 4-17 July, 2007.

³ See: Iu. Solozobov, "Kazakhstan—vazhneyshiy interfeys Rossii," RIA Novosti, 3 August, 2007, available at [www.rian.ru].

⁴ Parties were listed in keeping with their position in the voting bulletins.

A distinguishing feature of the proportional election system is the emphasis not on specific personalities, but on the competition of ideas and proposals, that is, on election platforms.⁵ In the election race, Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the NSDP can be singled out as the leaders in the election platform ratings. The program documents of the CPK, CPPK, Auyl, and Rukhaniyat were not very well developed, and it stands to reason that in order to gain the most votes, a party's program should primarily meet the interests of the electorate and encompass all the vitally important social problems.

Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the NSDP can be singled out from among all the political parties in terms of how systemically and comprehensively they presented urgent questions in their election platforms. For example, the election platforms of Auyl, Rukhaniyat, the PPK, and the CPPK are characterized by brevity and an emphasis on specific problems. In so doing, the CPPK and PPK did not develop a systems approach in presenting the main provisions of their programs.⁶ Another serious shortcoming of these parties is the absence of original ideas and proposals capable of arousing the electorate's interest.

If we look at the distinguishing features of the election platforms, we can ascertain significant differences between them. Nur Otan's program is extensive and encompasses the comprehensive development plans of the entire country.⁷ The NSDP's platform is distinguished by a high degree of radicality and is counterposed to Nur Otan's platform. The Ak Zhol Party put forward a program characterized by an unusual form of delivery, as well as by a creative approach.⁸

The platform of the Auyl Party concentrates exclusively on the agricultural problem, whereby other groups of voters and their problems are beyond the field of vision of this structure.⁹ A similar situation also developed in the Rukhaniyat Party. Whereas Auyl decided to focus on a limited electorate, Rukhaniyat concentrated in its platform on humanitarian issues. As for the CPPK and the Party of Patriots, their election platforms are reminiscent in form and content of pre-election leaflets. The platforms of these parties are presented in extremely condensed form and consist of separate theses.¹⁰

Nor can we ignore the fact that the elections were scheduled early, there was not much time to prepare for them, but they made it possible to distinguish between actually functioning party organizations and those parties that only lived "from election to election."

The 2007 campaign also had specific characteristics:

- (a) for the first time in Kazakhstan's political history, parliamentary elections were held according to party lists;
- (b) members of the Kazakhstan National Assembly were delegated to the country's representative body.

In so doing, parallel to the parliamentary elections, elections to the local representative bodies, *maslikhats*, were also held, but they simply went unnoticed against the background of the intense inter-party struggle.

Today, the foundations of power are undergoing active transformation in Kazakhstan, and parties are becoming the key actors in the political process. Participation of political parties alone in the political process is giving rise to de-personification of the electoral procedure and presumes

⁵ See: A. Tastenov, "Semero smelykh. S chem idut kazakhstanskije partii na vybory?" available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1186126800>].

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

competition of the programs and ideas contained in the election platforms. It is also generally accepted that the proportional system makes it possible to take into account all the political interests and help to ensure social stability where ethnic and other groups need to have representation in the legislative bodies.

As for the second specific aspect, it should be noted that this is Kazakhstani know-how, which does not have any analogues in world political practice. The fact that the Assembly acquired a constitutional status and the right to be represented in parliament is something new. The Assembly, which was created 12 years ago as an advisory body for harmonizing ethnic relations, has become a full-fledged institution of the political system.¹¹

It is important that the 2007 electoral process occurred peacefully, without any outrages or public unrest. This says that the government ensured equality and all the necessary conditions were created for honest and open competition. During the election campaign, all the participants in the election procedure strove to carry out their activity within the law, on the basis of mutual respect and objectivity. It is worth pointing out a certain illusion was created that the radical opposition had also been incorporated into the civilized political struggle.

And of course, Kazakhstan citizens have become more politically mature, competent, and discriminating in their partialities. It is also important to note that Kazakh society does not accept radical ideas. Therefore, as Russian political scientists believe, parties like the LDPR with Zhirinovskiy at the helm cannot expect support of the electorate.¹² During the many years of stability, society is steadily oriented toward positive initiatives and this, experts believe, is the key to understanding the electoral moods in Kazakhstan. The so-called “conservatism” factor is also present here, which, incidentally, exists in essentially every country with a blossoming economy. Psychologically, people do not want sudden changes capable of causing instability. Under these conditions, the opposition parties have to reject their old orientation toward extreme assessments and absolute criticism. As a result, the scenarios of a radical development of the electoral process have not justified themselves.

What is more, the 2007 election campaign was distinguished by unprecedented information openness and broad access of all the parties to agitation possibilities and resources. It must be admitted that this is indeed a great breakthrough in democratization compared with the previous election procedures. In order to ensure the equal access of political parties to the mass media and provide the voters with as much information as possible about their election programs, the format of open political debates was expanded.

In particular, subsidies from the republic’s Central Elections Commission provided political parties with live air time on the Khabar state television station during the popular *Betpe-bet* program, as well as with air time on Kazakh radio. In addition, the country’s two central newspapers, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda* and *Egemen Kazakstan*, provided print space at the CEC’s expense for publishing interviews with the leaders or representatives of political parties. And finally, many television channels set up “discussion courts” on their own initiative, where television debates were held with the participation of activists from all the political parties involved in the election procedure. During the campaign, party leaders held various Internet conferences. Incidentally, the use of various forms of Internet communication for agitation is another innovation of the past election race. In compliance with the Law on Elections, on 10 August, 2007, debates between political parties were also held on the Khabar TV channel.¹³

¹¹ See: “Glava gosudarstva prinial uchastie v zasedanii Soveta Assamblei naroda Kazakhstana,” available at [<http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708070333>].

¹² According to the information of the RIA Novosti Information Agency, available at [www.rian.ru].

¹³ According to the data of the Kazakhstan Central Elections Commission, available at [www.election.kz].

At the same time, as the CEC notes, there was not one sufficiently justified complaint during the campaign about restricted access to the mass media. If certain parties were restricted in some way, this was done within the framework of the law and the interrelations between owner and client.

The results of the media monitoring on how often they featured parties during the election campaign show that the number of mentions of a particular party depended on the activity of the structures themselves.¹⁴ According to the monitoring results, the conclusions are unequivocal: the mass media did not give special attention to any one party and any complaints by the members of individual party organizations about “unequal” coverage of their activity were unfounded.¹⁵ Nur Otan, Ak Zhol, and the NSDP were the record-holders with respect to the number of times they were mentioned in the mass media. But this did not mean the mass media were loyal to these parties, just these three leaders held the largest number of image-making and propaganda functions.¹⁶

Society reacted quite calmly to the agitation-propaganda activity of the parties and possibly the population’s reticence, as well as its conscious views and moods, helped to minimize the level of black PR and political mud-slinging in the mass media. Although certain negative incidents did take place, they should be regarded as the attempts of individual players to draw society’s attention to themselves and somehow liven up the election process. For example, certain members of the CPPK, who accused the NSDP of “destabilizing the political situation,” tried to do this. In particular, E. Abylkasymov noted in his statements in the mass media that “the NSDP is fully carrying out its plan, which was most likely hatched in the bowels of the Western special services. All of their latest actions were aimed at carrying out a strategy ultimately aimed at bringing people out into the streets and organizing mass unrest.”¹⁷ Mutual accusations followed, which generally remained unnoticed and did not have an effect on the campaign. The same E. Abylkasymov was later involved in another conflict, when he unexpectedly wished the Nur Otan Party victory, for which he was taken off the CPPK’s list. On the whole, acute wing-dings, arguments, and debates among the parties, as well as with the electorate occurred in virtual space, on popular web forums, rather than in the streets. Nevertheless, one important conclusion can already be made: the new (proportional) system of elections has significantly raised the culture of public discussions and the responsibility of the party leaders.

* * *

As a result, 377 candidates from the seven aforementioned parties ran for 98 seats in the lower house of parliament. Another nine candidates were nominated by the Kazakhstan National Assembly (they participated in a separate voting).

On the whole, several weeks before the voting, both the leaders and the outsiders in the election procedure had been determined. It must be noted that according to all the sociological polls conducted, the Nur Otan Party should have received the greatest public support. The main intrigue was the fuss around which parties would gather the seven percent required to get into the Majilis of the country’s parliament. In so doing, according to experts’ preliminary estimates, the Nur Otan Party was supposed to receive up to 80% of the seats in parliament, and at least another two oppo-

¹⁴ See the weekly monitoring reports at [www.zonakz.net].

¹⁵ See: Vybory: monitoring SMI, available at [http://ndp-nurotan.kz/?f=show&ft=27&type=11&id=29084504659].

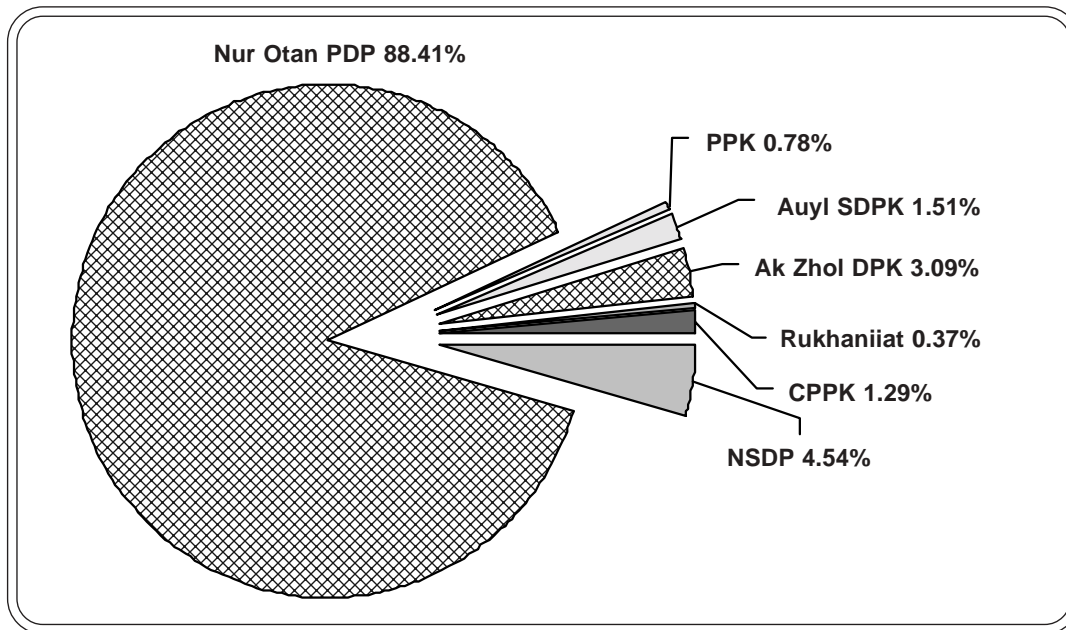
¹⁶ The third session of a permanent round table organized by the CEC was held in Astana with the participation of representatives of political parties on the topic “On the Course of the Election Campaign and its Coverage in the Mass Media,” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-2007081002].

¹⁷ “Chlen KNPk obviniaet OSDP v ‘destabilizatsii politicheskoi obstanovki,’” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708100329].

sition parties were to obtain proportional representation.¹⁸ It was presumed that they would be Ak Zhol and the NSDP, which could have livened up the political process in the republic, but these forecasts were not justified.

On 18 August, at 7:00 local time, 9,728 polling stations opened in every region of the country, in 1,512 of which the Saylau electronic voting system operated as planned. By 21:00, the voting was over, and at 22:00, the final information was available about how many Kazakhstanis had voted at the special election of deputies to the Majilis of the parliament and at the regular elections of deputies to the maslikhats of all levels: 5,726,544 voters (or 64.56 percent of the electorate) carried out their right to vote.

Percentage Ratio of the Voting Results¹⁹



The results of the recent elections shattered all the forecasts of political scientists: only one political organization—Nur Otan—obtained seats in the Majilis of the fourth convocation. The other six parties that participated in the parliamentary elections could not overcome the 7-percent barrier. On the eve of the elections, no one in Kazakhstan or beyond the republic doubted that the party in power would win, but the fact that not only third, but also second place were not filled came as a complete surprise to everyone. No one objectively expected this kind of result, neither the government, nor the opposition, nor the experts, nor the observers.²⁰

In addition to the unexpected election results, specialists also noted the unprecedented activity of the Kazakhstan electorate at elections of this level, which shows the desire of the country's citizens to be involved in the changes going on in the state.²¹ Throughout the entire republic,

¹⁸ According to the data of the Institute of Comparative Social Studies "CESSI-Kazakhstan," available at [www.e.gov.kz/sailau2007?lan=ru].

¹⁹ Appendix to the resolution of the Kazakhstan Central Elections Commission of 22 August, 2007, No. 113/242, available at [www.election.kz].

²⁰ See: I. Nevolin, "Rezultaty golosovaniia prevzoshli vse ozhidaniia," *Liter*, 20 August, 2007.

²¹ See: L. Tusupbekova, "Tolko vmeste! Tolko vpered!" *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 22 August, 2007.

8,891,561 citizens featured on the voter lists, 6,082,430 of whom participated in the voting, or 68.4 percent. Outside the polling stations, 185,979 voters cast their votes. According to the Kazakhstan CEC, the largest number of voters came to the polling stations in the Almaty (90.12%) and North Kazakhstan (75.03%) regions. The lowest turnout was registered in the country's two main cities, Astana and Almaty.

Distribution of Electorate's Votes²²

Political Parties	Number of Votes
National Social-Democratic Party	269,310
Nur Otan People's Democratic Party	5,247,720
Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan	46,436
Auyl Social-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan	89,855
Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan	183,346
Rukhaniyat Party	22,159
Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan	76,799

According to some data, CEC employees note that this time the electorate was so organizationally consolidated that the leaders of the NSDP could only obtain seats in the Majilis if the election results were falsified. The CEC simply would not permit such violations of the law in favor of falsely understood plurality of the parliament.²³ On the whole, the voter turnout at the current elections was higher than the index for previous years. In 2003, 56.4 percent participated in the elections of deputies to the maslikhats, in 2004, 56.8 percent of the voters participated in the elections of Majilis deputies.²⁴ Today, we can point to the main reasons for the electorate's high activity.

- First, there was a very powerful information background accompanying the elections. The current election campaign was much more extensive than the 2004 parliamentary elections in technological and emotional scope. What is more, the republic's CEC, in turn, took a whole series of systemic steps in order to help the political parties bring their election programs to the voters.
- Second, those political parties for which each vote was important in order to overcome the 7-percent barrier made numerous addresses to the voters. This is another plus of the proportional election system. If, in the past, the fate of deputy mandates was resolved in certain districts where, due to local specific features, the candidates were not always interested in voter activity, now a high turnout was a determining factor in the success of all the election participants.
- And third, the parliamentary elections received significant support from nongovernmental organizations, which set themselves the task of drawing as many people as possible into the voting process. The widespread campaign "Your Vote—Your Future" and the multitude of

²² According to the Kazakhstan CEC, available at [www.election.kz].

²³ See: S. Mekebaev, "Togo, kto vyshel iz naroda, obratno ne zamanish," *Vremia*, 23 August, 2007.

²⁴ According to the data of the Kazakhstan CEC, available at [www.election.kz].

billboards and posters naturally played their role.²⁵ In so doing, the elections also gave a strong boost to the development of a civil society as such in Kazakhstan, which was particularly seen in the active interaction between the parties and nongovernmental organizations.

On 20 August, elections of candidates to the Majilis from the Kazakhstan National Assembly were held at one national polling station. The voter list featured 364 citizens—members of the KNA Council—of whom 337 participated in the voting, or 92.58 percent. What is more, 9 candidates for deputy to the Majilis of the parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan participated in the elections, who were representatives of the German, Ukrainian, Russian, Belorussian, Kazakh, Uzbek, Bulgarian, Uighur, and Korean ethnic groups.²⁶

**Voting Results of
the Kazakhstan National Assembly Council²⁷**

Name	Number of votes	%
M. Akhmadiev	312	93.13
V. Vishnichenko	310	92.54
E. Kappel	300	89.55
L. Pitalenko	314	93.73
R. Polishchuk	295	88.06
K. Sadvakasov	297	88.66
R. Khalmuradov	314	93.73
L. Khochieva	310	92.54
V. Tsoi	304	90.75

Deputies from the Assembly will be called upon to be “friendship envoys,” the activity of whom will be aimed at further improving government policy in the interests of the people of Kazakhstan. It should be emphasized that this practice has no analogues, and so it is still too early to talk about how effective this step will be and forecast its prospects. As for the rest, the idea of ethnic representation in the parliament is aimed at further developing the Kazakhstani model of ethnic and confessional peace and consent in the country.

The election campaign was held with a previously unprecedented number of international observers from among international organizations and some states of the Near and Far Abroad. On the whole, the number of accredited international observers was estimated at 1,129. There were 448 observers in the CIS Mission from six Commonwealth member states, 13 observers from the SCO Mission, 137 from seven foreign states, and 71 from international organizations.²⁸ The ODIHR/OSCE Mission had 460 accredited observers from 28 OSCE member states. In so doing, the latter appointed Canadian senator Consiglio Di Nino as its Special Coordinator and Head of the OSCE Election

²⁵ According to the information of the Khabar Information Agency, available at [www.khabar.kz].

²⁶ See: “Upolnomochennyye etnosom,” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708070332].

²⁷ Appendix to the resolution of the Kazakhstan CEC of 22 August, 2007, No. 113/242.

²⁸ According to the data of the Kazakhstan CEC, available at [www.election.kz].

Observation Mission at parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan, which indicates the high interest in the republic.

After the election results were announced, the OSCE Observer Mission published its first preliminary assessments. The document noted “progress worthy of approval,” but it was also said that “several international standards were not observed—in particular, certain elements of the new legislation and vote-counting process:” in 40% of the polling stations visited by observers, the latter was evaluated “negatively due to insufficient transparency.”²⁹ An evaluation of the elections by the above-mentioned Mission might add to the doubts about the possibility of the OSCE’s positive decision at the end of this year of Astana’s application for the right to chair in this organization in 2009.

According to observers from the Russian Federation, PRC, the U.S., Turkey, Israel, the CIS, PACE, and the SCO, all the necessary conditions were created in Kazakhstan for holding an honest and transparent election campaign.³⁰ According to their evaluations, organization of the elections met all the requirements of democracy. The observers noted that the political parties ran a correct election campaign, were given equal access to the mass media, and that a calm political atmosphere reigned in the country. The measures undertaken in the republic aimed at ensuring equal conditions for all the political parties in the election campaign were also positively assessed. In particular, the observers are sure that all the measures undertaken should give rise to frameworks and rules for freer and more honest elections. In their opinion, the current political changes are a step in the right direction.³¹

To be objective, it should be noted that no one in fact needed this landslide victory of one party, since it did not fit into the framework of the political reforms that have begun. Why was it necessary then to disband the parliament and make amendments to the legislation if the opposition members were unable to gain a single seat in the new composition of the Majilis? This is never talked about openly, but everyone understands very well that the special elections were held to a certain extent to please the government’s opponents, who have been insisting for the past two years that they “are not allowed to sit in the driver’s seat anywhere,” while they consider themselves long grown up. Akorda, by making concessions to the opposition, made preparations to integrate the latter into the state management mechanism. It created various structures, such as the Permanent Assembly on Democratization, the National Democratization Commission, and State Commission for Specification of the Democratic Reforms, which sooner or later were to lead to real political modernization. In this respect, the arguments of the leaders of most of the political organizations that they were not ready for the elections sound rather absurd today.³²

On the whole, the election race took such an unexpected turn due to the combination of several circumstances. These circumstances include the main reasons for Nur Otan’s success: there can be no doubt that the personality of the party leader, Nursultan Nazarbaev, was the most important factor in the victory. Nur Otan’s sensational spurt ahead of all the others was due to Nursultan Nazarbaev’s image, which was projected onto the image of the party. In so doing, the party largely repeated the result of the 2005 campaign.³³ The party is distinguished by a well-developed and broad ideological base, which can briefly be characterized as reformist, since it suggests that the voters preserve all the achievements reached during the years of independence and their determination to continue the policy of comprehensive reform. In the election campaign, Nur Otan placed the em-

²⁹ A. Dubnov, “Kazakhskaiia SSR,” available at [www.vremya.ru].

³⁰ See: D. Popazov, “Proverka reform proshla uspešno,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 21 August, 2007.

³¹ See: “Politiki SShA o vyborakh v Kazakhstane.” According to the information of the Khabar Information Agency of 15 August, 2007.

³² See: I. Nevolin, op. cit.

³³ According to the results of the presidential election in 2005, Nursultan Nazarbaev gathered 91.15% of the votes.

phasis being positive: under the conditions of economic growth and personal prosperity, a positive mood during the election campaign is the most efficacious, since it fully coincides with the optimistic mood of the electorate.³⁴

Despite the fact that, according to the experts' forecasts, either the moderate opposition party, Ak Zhol, or the team of prominent Kazakhstani oppositionists, NSDP, were supposed to obtain seats in the lower house, neither of them was able to overcome the 7-percent barrier. It was very logical to expect the government to prepare early for these elections, but it was difficult to believe that the opposition would be so unprepared this time. Today, many arguments can be found to justify this situation, but saying there was not enough time to run the election race is tantamount to admitting complete helplessness.³⁵

Now it is clear that the Kazakhstan opposition essentially flopped the latest parliamentary elections. During the 2005 presidential election, it showed much better results. But this time, the opposition forces revealed themselves in a more than unconvincing light, and there are objective reasons for this. I think it would be best to start with the least promoted name, after all it is clear that not all the opposition-minded voters were so politically well-versed to understand the difference between Ak Zhol and the NSDP, particularly since the matter concerned the former associates of a previously united opposition brand. The conflict image of the opposition leaders again worked to their disadvantage: while touching on particular problems they always placed their stakes on the negative. A fundamental mistake of the opposition is also that if it unites, it does this on a destructive rather than a creative foundation—not “for,” but “against.”³⁶

It was unproductive on the part of the radicals from the NSDP to present their alliance as a way of fighting the current government, posing as opponents of the head of state. After all, any sociological poll will show that society is very supportive of Nursultan Nazarbaev's policy. In so doing, the opposition set itself against most of the electorate.

It is also unfortunate that the opponents of the highest leadership concentrated their efforts not on developing their own program of action and bringing its content to the population, but on searching for shortcomings in the organization of the elections and exposing the government's “conspiracies” against the opposition. It is thought that the defeat of many political organizations at the 2007 parliamentary elections was graphic evidence for all the Kazakhstani parties that the voters' trust can only be won by consistent and systematic activity, and the elections are only the concluding phase of this work.³⁷ The opposition spent time that could and should have been used to work with the electorate during the election campaign on various intrigues, which ended up making the images of some of the political figures and formations very unattractive.

As Director of the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies B. Sultanov believes, Kazakhstan's opposition parties could not obtain seats in the Majilis because they underestimated the level of political awareness of the voters and the changes going on in the country after the previous parliamentary elections. According to him, “you used to be able to count on support after promoting some PR project and supporting it with media resources and foreign funding.”³⁸

As most political scientists note, alienation is the greatest weakness of the radical Kazakhstani opposition: for this reason, it had neither unconditional unity, nor “breakthrough” projects or progressive programs. The inability to achieve a “common denominator” is prompting the alienated and ambitious members of the opposition to enter all kinds of politically unnatural unions.

³⁴ See: “Piat prichin pobedy. Pochemu partiia vlasti vyigrala vybory,” available at [<http://www.liter.kz/site.php?lan=russian&id=151&pub=8035>].

³⁵ See: B. Karimov, “Sistemnyy krizis kazakhstanskoi oppozitsii,” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-200708030328].

³⁶ E. Ertysbaev, “Slagaemye pobedy,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 22 August, 2007.

³⁷ See: “Piat prichin pobedy. Pochemu partiia vlasti vyigrala vybory.”

³⁸ “Avtoritetno,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 21 August, 2007.

Minister of Culture and Information E. Ertysbaev called the opposition a “mixture of high expectations and many years of unfulfilled hopes,”³⁹ and it should be said that, despite the high emotionality of his statement, it is true. The Kazakhstani opposition does not want to change in compliance with the new realities and demands of the times, while the government has already long spurred ahead.

After losing, the opposition leaders began actively accusing the highest leadership of unfair elections, electoral machinations, and falsification of the voting results. For example, the leaders of the NSDP claimed that they gathered approximately 30% of the votes at the election of deputies to the Majilis. “We are sure that we gathered up to 30%, but we see how elections are always held in our country, although we are promised they will be honest and transparent. But this doesn’t happen,” emphasized the party’s co-chairman B. Abilov. The oppositionists also stated that they have sufficient prove of many violations and even of falsification of the results.⁴⁰

It will be very disappointing if the opposition parties devote the next five years not to “working on their mistakes” and establishing close contacts with the electorate, but to criticizing and opposing the government. At present, such parties as Ak Zhol and the NSDP should review their own approaches to party activity, make corresponding changes in their work, and create a competitive program of action. The elections revealed all the weaknesses and mistakes of these parties, and now it is time to start living not “from election to election,” but on a permanent and professional basis. Otherwise, the electorate, the political culture and socioeconomic priorities of which are constantly growing and changing, will not support the opposition at the next election in 2012 either. The 2007 electoral test showed that the opposition was unable to keep up with the development trends in Kazakhstan’s current political processes, or skillfully apply the new opportunities to their own interests.

* * *

As we have shown, the elections were ambiguously evaluated. On the one hand, they were organized openly, but the results definitely surprised everyone, the government itself, society, and the international experts. Foreign specialists immediately drew attention to the fact that the voting results differed from the goal announced by the government to make the political system more open with the help of the constitutional reforms being carried out during the year. It seems to me that the foreign mass media took up the argument without completely understanding the essence of the question and without delving into the specifics of the political process in Kazakhstan. On the other hand, Kazakhstani society itself supports the changes going on and is this not what a democratic society requires? So the entire “information scandal” raised around the results of the campaign only arouses confusion, as well as mistrust in the competence of the critically-oriented international experts.

Kazakhstan’s experience has drawn the attention of its neighbors. For example, the head of Russia’s CEC noted that the Russian delegation regarded its observation function during the elections in Kazakhstan as a chance to gain experience before the upcoming parliamentary elections in Russia. Another goal of the current election season in the republic is to bring Kazakhstan’s and Russia’s electoral cycles into alignment. Its priority task is to synchronize the development of the political systems of the two countries, and it should be said that certain progress has already been made in this matter: this year will pass under the sign of parliamentary elections in both Kazakhstan and Russia. It is expected that more synchronization will be possible as early as 2012, when each country will be holding a presidential election. After this period, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation will follow parallel

³⁹ E. Ertysbaev, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ See: I. Azar, “Legitimnyy nursultanat,” available at [www.gazeta.ru].

courses, looking over their shoulders at each other, which will raise their special strategic cooperation to a new, higher level.⁴¹

It is thought that under the current conditions, the prospects of a second party in power appearing from the constructive segment of the opposition, Ak Zhol, have been reduced to naught. But now the government is clearly encountering problems concerning Nur Otan's political management, the domination of which will lead to two results: either to rapid degeneration of the newly matured "party in power" into a "parliamentary bog," or to a controlled split into "leftist" and "rightist" factions, which is absolutely inevitable during serious parliamentary activity and natural during imitation of this work.⁴²

Many experts predict that the parliament of the fourth convocation will not be dynamic enough. Political scientist D. Satpaev believes in general that "from now on the fate of the Majilis will be to obediently stamp the president's draft laws."⁴³ Nevertheless, the emphasis should be placed on another special feature of the future elections. According to their results, not only will the parliament be formed, but also the government, for, according to the constitutional amendments, the party that wins the upcoming elections to the Majilis will form the government, define the republic's development program, and be responsible for implementing this policy.

The fact that only one party obtains seats in the parliament in no way means that party-building in Kazakhstan has been put on hold or taken a step back in its development. In my view, the vectors of further improvement in party work in the mid-term have been clearly defined. This is also important for Kazakhstan, since there are no political parties, which have been in demand more than ten years here, that have been through more than one election campaign and have experience working with the voters. Such structures are not formed overnight, but they are precisely what a contemporary, strong, and competitive democratic state needs. This is why it is important not only for the parties themselves, but also for the country and society as a whole, that they find their niche and strengthen their own position.

⁴¹ See: Iu. Solozobov, *op. cit.*

⁴² See: A. Karavaev, "Nur Otan" vosparil nad realnostiu ("Edinaia Rossia" dolzhna zadumatsia)," available at [www.ia-centr.ru/public_details.php?id=798].

⁴³ V. Iadukha, "Stepnaia demokratiia," RBK Daily, 20 August, 2007.

RUSSIA'S POLICY IN CENTRAL EURASIA: SPECIFICS AND PROSPECTS

RUSSIA IN CENTRAL ASIA: RETREAT, RETENTION, OR RETURN?

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THE YEAR 1991: RUSSIA'S RESPONSIBILITY (*Yeltsin vs. Gorbachev*)

On 18 October, 2004, the Russian Federation joined the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) and so can be called a Central Asian state. This distorted the region's geography and changed its political composition. On 13 December, 1991, five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) set up this integration structure in response to the Soviet Union's breakup and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was, at first, purely Slavic.

The events of 1991 are directly related to the present and provide answers to many of the questions raised by the transformations going on in the newly independent states (NIS) and their foreign policy. It is often—and correctly—said that the former Soviet republics were not ready for independence; in fact, it seems that Russia itself was not ready for it. Yet it was Russia that sent the ball of breakup rolling in June 1991: it declared independence and challenged the results of the all-Union referendum that took place earlier, on 17 March and formalized the will of the people to preserve the Union. Russia's political step was absolutely senseless: all the republics that united around it in the 1920s completely depended on it. In this context, Russia's present attempts at "gathering in the lands" it itself scattered look paradoxical. To succeed it must revise two major issues:

- (1) **the principles of the 1991 disintegration and**
- (2) **the principles of 21st century reintegration.**

Stephen Cohen, professor of Russian history at New York University, has correctly pointed out that those who want to understand Putin's Russia would do best to put it in the context of a national collapse that followed the Soviet Union's breakup. He says: "It is hard to imagine a political act more extreme than abolishing what was still, for all its crises, a nuclear superpower state of 286 million citizens. And yet Yeltsin did it, as even his sympathisers acknowledged, in a way that was 'neither legitimate nor democratic.' ...Political and economic alternatives still existed in Russia after 1991, and none of the factors contributing to the end of the Soviet Union were inexorable."¹ This goes contrary to the more or less commonly accepted opinion (mainly in Russia and the Soviet successor states) that the Soviet Union was doomed because its political system was in a deep crisis. The West never expected, and did not want, this tragedy. Much was done to help President Mikhail Gorbachev to keep his country afloat.²

Today, Russia, when dealing with the former Soviet republics, works hard to pretend that the year 1991 can be dismissed as an ordinary event to be rectified through reunification. The laws of history and international relations (which we, the political scientists, discover and study) will not allow Russia to succeed in its integration contrivance (so far this is a contrivance and nothing more), which will remain half-backed and will look suspicious and even provocative. All integration processes develop along certain patterns and are based on certain principles and values. This much has already been proven by the theoreticians of integration.

This means that to remain within strictly academic limits, we should investigate the sources, driving forces, principles, aims, effects and even the moral fundamentals of the policies the CIS countries are pursuing in their mutual relations. This primarily applies to Russia's policy toward its CIS colleagues. We would do best to start from the very beginning and look back at the events of 1991. The type of relations still prevailing among the NIS was imposed by Russia on the eve of the Soviet Union's breakup. I am inclined to call it Yeltsin's heritage. It destroyed or pushed away the type of relations born by the perestroika (a period that is almost forgotten), which I prefer to describe as Gorbachev's approach.

As time goes on I become more and more convinced that Russia should abandon Yeltsin's heritage for political and moral reasons. As a scholar I find it hard to fathom why the blame for the Soviet Union's demise was shifted onto Mikhail Gorbachev, who would have died in the last ditch to keep the U.S.S.R. alive, and why, in Russia's recent history, Boris Yeltsin is lauded as a great reformer. The facts point to the contrary. I have to say here that when talking about the need to condemn the

¹ S. Cohen, "The Breakup of the Soviet Union Ended Russia's March to Democracy," *The Guardian*, 13 December, 2006.

² See, for example, a book written by Anatoly Chernyaev, former advisor to the U.S.S.R. President Gorbachev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev: Notes from a Diary*, Transl. and ed. by R. English and E. Tucker, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2000.

decision that put an end to the Soviet Union, I am not driven by nostalgia over the now dead state. The past cannot be revived: my only desire is to remove the disfiguring black spots, falsifications, and ideological speculations from our ideas, opinions and historical memory in order to shape the right ideas about the past and the future.

The international dimension of 1991 calls for dotting the “i’s”—a task of primary importance for Russia. In 1991, it not only destroyed the superpower, but also put an end (thanks to Gorbachev, not Yeltsin) to the era of the bi-polar world and the Cold War. We are tempted to ask: Did it end? The relations of the Cold War era are being revived. Why did Russia abandon the policy of rapprochement with the West and particularly the United States it started in the 1980s? Why is another Big Game underway in Central Asia?

It has been written many times that the geopolitical transformations in Central Asia started when the Soviet super-state left the stage and triggered the Big Game in the region. World and regional states, as well as the Central Asian countries, are all involved in the unfolding process. As distinct from the Big Game of the past, it has attracted many more entities. Russia is another important factor: all the players are adjusting their policies, to one degree or another, to its interests. More than that: the geopolitical players are firmly convinced that Central Asia is a zone of Russia’s domination (a sphere of Russia’s influence). Russian politicians and political scientists are bending over backwards in an effort to confirm this. To my mind, the West/the U.S. has already reconciled itself to this reality, of which the Russian Federation should be fully aware. Why are the ideas about the Western/American conspiracy in Central Asia still alive in Russia, which is convinced that it is being squeezed out? These questions are directly related to the dramatic year of 1991 and Russia’s responsibility for it.

From the Central Asian countries’ very first days of independence, Russia’s policy was far from ambiguous; it was changeable, or even contradictory, and can be best described as “retreat,” “retention,” and “return.”

By “retreat,” I mean the shrunken scope, the lower level, and Russia’s much diminished presence in the region, something that undermined Russia’s economy and geopolitical status. The vacuum left behind was immediately filled with the West’s growing presence.

By “retention,” I mean Moscow’s desire to preserve status quo or the current geopolitical situation without much loss for itself.

By “return,” I mean Russia’s stronger presence in the region in various forms from cultural and economic to geopolitical and strategic.

Russian expert Dmitry Trenin used the following terms to describe more or less similar realities: “leave and forget,” “outpost as placeholders,” and “*Reconquista*.”³

The three elements coexisted; they were alternatively coming to the fore or retreating, depending on the region’s changing geopolitical contexts and Russia’s position in the world. Recently, we have been watching Russia step up its involvement in the region (more about this below).

Any attempt at analyzing Russia’s policies/geopolitics in general and in Central Asia in particular should take into account the fact that the very complicated process of geopolitical transformations in the region has coincided with the emergence of a new world order and a revision of much that was previously accepted by the geopolitical theory. Today, so-called critical geopolitics is coming into being.⁴

For the purpose of this article, I will call the new trend of geopolitical thought democratic geopolitics, while the old practices I call imperial geopolitics (see the table).

³ D. Trenin, “Russia and Central Asia: Interests, Policies, and Prospects,” in: *Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, ed. by B. Rumer, D. Trenin, H. Zhao, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 2007, p. 121.

⁴ About new geopolitics see: *Geopolitics: Global Problems and Regional Concerns*, ed. by L. Tchantouridze, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Center for Defense and Security Studies, 2004 (see also: M.P. Amineh, *Globalization, Geopolitics and Energy Security in Central Eurasia and the Caspian Region*, Clingendael International Energy Program, The Hague, 2003).

Imperial geopolitics are	Democratic geopolitics are
Geopolitics of hatred	Geopolitics of recognition
Geopolitics of alienation	Geopolitics of growing closer
Geopolitics of mistrust	Geopolitics of agreement
Geopolitics of exclusion	Geopolitics of participation
Geopolitics of balancing	Geopolitics of possibilities
Geopolitics of hard force	Geopolitics of soft force
Geopolitics of containment	Geopolitics of involvement
Geopolitics of appropriating resources	Geopolitics of distributing resources
Geopolitics of domination	Geopolitics of cooperation
Geopolitics of spheres of influence	Geopolitics of globalization

In a more concise way, the difference between the two geopolitics can be formulated as follows: **imperial geopolitics is based on the conviction that war is possible, while democratic geopolitics is founded on the conviction that there is no alternative to peace.** An excellent work by well-known expert in geopolitics V. Tsymburskiy, *Geopolitika dlia evraziyskoy Atlantidy* (Geopolitics for Eurasian Atlantis), is logical, historically, and geopolitically relevant, as well as strategically Russia-centered for obvious reasons. It follows along the lines of the old geopolitics and does not exclude war: “It is in the interests of Russia that Uzbekistan, a member of newly-baked GUAM, remain isolated from the Caspian by the Kazakh and Turkmenian lands that can be used for the Indian Ocean route (the trade and pipeline route that connects the Indian Ocean in the south with Russia in the north via Iran, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan.—*F.T.*)”⁵ He believes that Russia should oppose all attempts to lay resource routes in Euro-Asia that bypass Russian territory and formulates the slogan “The Urals—Yes, the Caucasus—No!”⁶

Lena Jonson from the Swedish Institute of International Relations has offered a fairly clear definition of Russia’s interests in Central Asia: “Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia’s interests in Central Asia are mainly related to strategic and security concerns. The strategic interests are two-fold: first, to integrate the Central Asian states into the CIS sphere and make them close allies of Russia; and, second, to deny external powers strategic access to Central Asia.”⁷ This is what traditional imperial geopolitics is all about.

Russia’s Responsibility in the 21st Century (*Putin vs. Bush*)

The retention of the **post-Soviet context of reform** is one of the most important results of the sixteen years of development. I have in mind the fact that the Soviet socialist school, revived in its

⁵ V. Tsymburskiy, “Geopolitika dlia ‘evraziyskoy Atlantidy,’” *Pro et Contra*, No. 4, Vol. 4, 1999.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ R. Allison, L. Jonson, *Central Asian Security: The New International Context*, The Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 2001, pp. 97-101.

entirety (anti-Americanism included), dominates the domestic and foreign policy of the NIS. Russia's retreat, retention, and return are elements of classical and obsolete *Realpolitik*; this is what going on across the CIS.

Any model of post-Soviet integration/disintegration presupposes Russia's domination or at least its political influence as the factor predominating in the relations within the CIS. This probably explains why there is no unity in the CIS, which is in fact the key condition of unification: asymmetry of the Community's political composition is obvious. So it is no wonder that quasi- (or even pseudo-) integration formats are appearing all the time in the post-Soviet expanse.

For some time the analytical community remained optimistic about the future of the integration contrivance within the CIS. They argued: "Together Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan account for up to 94 percent of their common GDP and 88 percent of their trade turnover. Even though their economies differ greatly and their models of economic growth cannot be compared, they can be regarded as mutually complementary."⁸ (This approach is used to assess the SCO's strength and prospects.) The "percentage-based arguments" can be countered with:

- (1) Are the economies of the other CIS members not mutually complementary? Are the remaining 6 percent of the CIS members' common GDP and 12 percent of their trade turnover worth their commitment to the Community?
- (2) The aggregate GDP and the trade turnover of, say, Russia and China, are much larger than the indices of the Central Asian Four, but they are not integrating.
- (3) Was the economic complementarity of the given countries only discovered after the Soviet Union disintegrated? If complementarity exists, it also existed in the Soviet state.

Strangely enough, both potential economic complementarity and its absence are against integration across the CIS. Indeed, (a) economic determinism would have never permitted disintegration of the union state, the complete reformation of which was interrupted by the presidents of the three Slavic republics. The economic and political integration of Europe, which was going on at the same time, brought Europe close to forming a "union state." We had a union state we needed to finish reforming, not destroy, if the idea of mutual economic complementarity of the said republics holds water; (b) if we accept the conception of economic inexpediency and political inconsistency of the CIS, then the models of the EurAsEC and the Organization of Regional Integration (ORI) can be described as irrelevant.

Meanwhile, the opening of the post-Soviet expanse to the world, including the West, undermined the prospects for the revival of a certain semblance of the former Union and Russia's status as an integration core. The Russian foreign policy establishment is probably unable to create anything else so far, apart from Cold War rudiments: the processes, and the Soviet Union's withdrawal from the scene, were too fast. Russia retreated, retained its position, and returned to the region at one and the same time.

It is no wonder that S. Markedonov described present-day Russia's strategy in the CIS as a strategy of containment. Today, Moscow has limited its mission in the post-Soviet expanse to efforts to stabilize the situation at any cost. He has written the following, which is worth quoting here in full: **"Stabilization is the key concept of Russia's policy in the CIS, or its quintessence. Such concepts as development, progress, and democracy are absent from Russia's political vocabulary; they have been given over to the United States and the EU countries, which are pursuing their own**

⁸ K. Syroezhkin, "Paradoksy integratsii. Edinaia Evrazia," *Pro et contra*, available at [www.centrasia.org], 14 August, 2003.

selfish interests in Central Asia. Instrumentally, this mission can be realized only through supporting the 'parties in power' and the government in general, as well as by refusing to talk to the opposition. Today, Russia is performing these scenarios when dealing with Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and, to a much lesser extent, with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the unrecognized states. While supporting the ruling regimes, the Kremlin has no contacts with the second and third echelons of the government in these states. This means that it is not protected against surprises if the people at the helm make a sudden about turn.

"Moscow's orientation toward 'stagnation' and the unlimited support of the people in power deprives it, and has already deprived it, of promising and potential allies among those who tend toward modernization and change.

"First, Russia's foreign policy in the CIS pursues Russia's interests rather than those of the corrupt party nomenklatura. Second, if the Kremlin is working toward the best results, it should not oppose stability and development (read: modernization). This means that Russia should not limit itself to 'freezing' and 'containment.' It should encourage modernization, which might become the main prerequisite of stability and democracy."⁹

In the 21st century, the future of the post-Soviet expanse, and of Central Asia as its part, will depend on the outcome of the struggle between what can be described very conventionally as *the Bush-style and Putin-style approaches*. Let me explain: the American president represents democratic expansion and development, while his Russian colleague rejects this under the pretext that this is an imposition of democracy rather than its expansion.

George W. Bush's approach: "We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion. The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands... The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world" (Bush's Inauguration, 20 January, 2005) and "Democratic societies are peaceful societies—which is why, for the sake of peace, the world's established democracies must help the world's newest democracies succeed... In these countries, and across the world, those who claim their liberty will have an unwavering ally in the United States" (President Attends International Republican Institute Dinner, Renaissance Hotel, Washington, D.C.).

Vladimir Putin's approach: "We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. And independent legal norms are, as a matter of fact, coming increasingly closer to one state's legal system. One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural, and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this? ...The involvement of so-called nongovernmental organizations is tailored for this task. These organizations are formally independent but they are purposefully financed and are, therefore, under control [of foreign countries]."¹⁰

The phenomenon of the so-called Color Revolutions in some of the CIS countries marked a watershed between the American and Russian approaches to the future of the post-Soviet states, which was brought into bolder relief *by the way* the United States and Russia correlate democracy and security in Central Asia: while the Russian Federation remains convinced that the Ukrainian and the Georgian versions of "accelerated democratization" may cause destabilization and bring the radical opposition and radical Islamic forces together, and therefore the advance to democracy should be slow, the United States is convinced that procrastination may increase protest potential

⁹ S. Markedonov, "Kak vernut znachenie Rossii. Nuzhna 'konservativnaia model razvitiia'," *Prognosis.ru*, 18 April, 2006.

¹⁰ *Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy*, 10 February, 2007, available at [http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml].

and *also* bring the radical opposition and the radical Islamic forces together. Which of the two approaches is correct?

As time goes on, I become more and more convinced that the answer to this and other questions related to transformations of the NIS (in Central Asia and beyond it) lies in geopolitics, or rather in the geopolitical ideas of scholars and politicians. We have seen many times how Moscow regarded a more or less clear step toward, or even a sign of the Central Asian NIS's independent foreign policy or cooperation with the United States as a signal of their imminent (or accomplished) withdrawal from the Russia's zone of influence. To keep them within it, Moscow is prepared to deprive them of their democratic choice.

D. Trenin has written that "the civil war in Tajikistan sent a message to Moscow that democracy and Islamism were unacceptable alternatives to secular authoritarianism." He warned that "Islamism was intensely destabilizing, and threatening not only to end Russia's role in Central Asia, but to spread to Russia's own Muslim-populated regions, undermining the Russian Federation itself. As for democracy," he writes further, "that was not deemed a viable alternative in Central Asia: it could either pave the way for increased Western presence and pro-American policies at the expense of Russian interests, or, more likely, open the floodgate to Islamism."¹¹ Dmitry Trenin revealed not so much Russia's geopolitical concerns as its geopolitical wavering on the Central Asian issue. Let's discuss it in the contemporary context.

Russia's new responsibilities in the 21st century stem from the old geopolitical constant: according to the early 20th century classics of geopolitics, the country occupies a strategically key zone. Any power that gains access to it or controls it will automatically become a world hegemon. Today, Russia is no longer the only state in the zone—after 1991, it acquired several independent neighbors, particularly in Central Asia. The new geopolitical realities have cardinally changed the essence and importance of the so-called Central Asian question. It was formulated as the British-Russian question born by the conflict between the "sea" and the "land"—the strongest island power, the fleet of which dominated the World Ocean, and the largest continental power with territorial and political control over the world's heartland.¹²

Today it is no longer a British-Russian (or even American-Soviet or American-Russian) question of the late 20th century: **there is no Central Asian question in the sense and the form it was formulated in geopolitical thought, since it a priori denied the Central Asian countries and nations not only the right to self-determination, but also to participation in it.** By the mere fact of their independence, the Central Asian nations are modifying the perpetual geopolitical "land vs. sea" formula.

Russia has always been responsible for the Heartland—this was its share of the responsibility for what was going on in the world. Today, the NIS found within the Heartland are also partly responsible. Is Russia ready to accept this? Any answer from the Russian political community will be sincere and correct even if the answer is "No" and smacks of neo-imperialism. No matter what (empire, power, Eurasia, or Heartland), **Russia is and will remain an integrating state.** It should treat this mission with adequate responsibility, that is, in full conformity with the new democratic geopolitics.

Stephen Blank has said something that is worth noting. He has pointed out that Russia's diplomacy is demonstrating persistence and that the country insists on the once chosen course, even when the events that prompted it have disappeared.¹³ Indeed, conceptually, Russia's insistence on the mul-

¹¹ D. Trenin, op. cit., p. 91.

¹² See: V.I. Maksimenko, "Rossia i Azia, ili anti-Brzezinski (oherk geopolitiki 2000 goda)," *Vostok*, No. 4, 2000.

¹³ See: S. Blank, "Russia's Questionable Offensive in Asia," *Asia Times*, available at [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/EG01Ag02.html].

ti-polar worldwide expanse rebounds with the multi-polar post-Soviet political expanse, something that Zbigniew Brzezinski termed “geopolitical pluralism.” Carried away by the multi-polarity conception, which did not replace bi-polarity, but disappeared along with it (it appeared in the 1970s as an alternative to bi-polarity), many Russian politicians and political scientists gained nothing more than a conceptual “headache.” Today, several geopolitical schemes are coming into being within the multi-polar approach: Russia-China-India, Russia-Iran-China, Russia-Iran-India, or Russia-France-Germany as counterweights to the unipolar world as represented by the mythical American hegemony.

Brzezinski and many of his colleagues have already demonstrated that these schemes are still-born. There is another aspect of the same problem fully applied to the post-Soviet expanse. While enlisting allies in the Far Abroad (Iran, China, India, Iraq, or HAMAS), the Russians tend to ignore their Near Abroad neighbors and take their potential support of Russia’s anti-American moves for granted. The post-Soviet expanse itself is multi-polar: Ukraine, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan (the latter has not realized this) are the poles of local importance within the CIS.¹⁴

Here is a seemingly minor fact that sheds enough light on the problem. After studying his country’s energy and ideological problems, Tajik analyst I. Asadullaev arrived at the conclusion that the Russian analytical institutions and services regard the American conception of Greater Central Asia as a threat. “They interpret it as an attempt to separate the region from Russia,” writes the Tajik academic, “and look at themselves as the only source of regional security.”¹⁵

And further: “**Russia and China are two major factors of stability, but, by pursuing the policy of Tajikistan’s limited energy security, they threaten Tajikistan as a country. Every great country, the U.S. included, tends to help Tajikistan, if it accepts its strategy.**”¹⁶ He has come close to the thought that any of the Central Asian countries might once again lose (or not acquire, to be more exact) the right of decision-making on the Central Asian issue. The author has set himself the task of finding a suitable niche for his country and succeeded: “Russia as a stabilizing factor in the region, and in Tajikistan as its part, yet unwilling to permit it full independence in the energy sphere (meaning the Rogun Hydropower Station), is pushing Tajikistan toward the Muslim world in search of donors. This orientation will force Russia to retreat as a civilizational factor. Recently Tajikistan restored the national form of writing and pronouncing Tajik names. There is a lot of talk about replacing the Cyrillic with the Persian alphabet based on the Arabic.”¹⁷

Like many of his colleagues, Asadullaev cannot refrain from hinting that Russia is waging political games that are drawing both Dushanbe and Tashkent into Tajikistan’s energy security issue. This is promoting its “withdrawal” into the Islamic world, where there are forces waiting for it to distance itself from “the Russian factor in geopolitics and the spiritual-political aspects.”

And, finally, a revealing conclusion: “Russia is doing a lot to stabilize the situation in the region and in Tajikistan; it is a source of security. But it is pushing the country toward geopolitical alternatives to deal with the most urgent problems. This policy is dangerous both for Russia and Tajikistan. In recent years, Tajikistan has been trying to convince Moscow not to limit its presence to the military factor alone, even though construction of the Sangtuda Hydropower Plant is in progress. To accomplish this, Dushanbe is turning its attention to Russia’s rivals.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Here I use the term “pole” in the meaning accepted by world politics yet I shall not go into details of the well-known theory of poles.

¹⁵ I. Asadullaev, “Geopolitika ‘tiani-tolkai’ v Tsentral’noi Azii,” available at [www.centrasia.com], 4 July, 2007 (source—Ferghana.ru).

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

This means that beside the world poles, there are latent and obvious local poles potentially able to affect the moves of the world poles. Dmitry Trenin has quite rightly pointed out that: “Multi-polarity not only offers a simplified and distorted picture of the world, but also orientates Russia’s foreign policy toward aims that do not always have anything in common with its national interests.”¹⁹

What are Russia’s interests in Central Asia? For many years, since 1991, there have been no attempts to answer this question—it remained in the shadow of Russia’s world policy. Central Asia was a region of secondary importance for Russia. Russia was too engrossed in reforming its statehood (under Putin, it has been paying even more attention to this) and maintaining (preserving) its world power status. While, from the very beginning, the United States has been, and is, systematically demonstrating its interests in Central Asia, the Russian Federation has so far failed to formulate its position with respect to Central Asia. It was only recently that the Russian expert community exerted more serious efforts to understand, demonstrate, and rank Russia’s interests in Central Asia. Dmitry Trenin, for example, has grouped them into strategic and specific. The strategic interests concentrate on preserving internal stability, preventing Color Revolutions, containing the foreign military presence, maintaining allied relations between Central Asia and third countries; supporting inter-state stability; cutting down drug trafficking, and promoting nuclear non-proliferation. The specific interests, according to Trenin, are: (1) economic interests: closer cooperation in the security sphere under Moscow’s guidance; cooperation in the defense industry and arms trade; greater Russian military presence in the region; setting up a free trade zone; influencing the production and transportation of Caspian energy resources; domination in the Central Asian gas sector; control over the regional hydropower resources, and involvement in other economic sectors; (2) humanitarian interests: support of ethnic Russians; problems of labor migration from Central Asia to the Russian Federation; promotion of the Russian language in the Central Asian countries; and creation of a common information expanse.²⁰

Dmitry Trenin suggests that Russia “**do not attempt to become the sole security guarantor of Central Asia; and recognize that, in Central Asia, the fundamental interests of Russia and the United States coincide; cease regarding the American presence in the region as inherently anti-Russian** (bold type mine.—*F.T.*)”²¹

V. Tsymburskiy, quoted above, has a slightly different opinion about the same subject—Central Asian studies in Russia have obviously gained momentum. He has written: “The crazy ideas à la Dugin-Mitrofanov about the geopolitical division of Central Asia should not be encouraged as obviously provocative and breeding crises among the three powers (Russia, China, and Iran.—*F.T.*). They are also pushing the local elites and nations to invite the West to be a defender and guarantor of their sovereignty.”²² I totally agree with the first part of what is quoted above, but refuse to understand why the West should be prevented from becoming the defender and guarantor of the Central Asian states’ sovereignty. In other words: why should Russia perform this mission? Why should we prevent the world’s leading countries from helping the local states to protect their sovereignty and independence as a value and an aim of great importance? I am growing increasingly convinced that when talking about Central Asia’s calls “on the West as the defender and guarantor of their sovereignty,” Russia has in mind not so much the issue of sovereignty as the Western challenge issue. Russia is obviously not as interested in Central Asian sovereignty and independence as it is in its own sovereignty (there

¹⁹ D. Trenin, “Nenadezhnaia strategija,” *Pro et Contra*, Vol. 6, No. 1-2, 2001, pp. 51-65.

²⁰ See: D. Trenin, “Russia and Central Asia: Interests, Policies, and Prospects,” pp. 75-136.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

²² V. Tsymburskiy, *op. cit.*

is a Western challenge). It turns out that the two sovereignties (of Central Asia and Russia) are incompatible. These are just scholastic deliberations.

I used them to attract the analysts and the academic community to the hermeneutic problem of Central Asian studies: explanation and interpretation, on the one hand, and understanding, on the other, are mutually dependent. This leads to a hermeneutic circle, which means that in order to understand anything it should be studied and vice versa. Indeed, the U.S. and Russia can be regarded either as antagonists in Central Asia or as partners. One can be a pessimist when it comes to Central Asian integration or an optimist. The problems that mar the relations among the Central Asian states can be interpreted as disuniting, or as stimulating cooperation.

Meanwhile, the signs of Russian-American rapprochement in Central Asia and even of certain modifications of the Central Asian issue became clearer during President George W. Bush's visit to Moscow in May 2002. The Joint Statement on Counterterrorist Cooperation, a product of the Moscow visit, said, in part: "Believing that the sovereignty, long-term stability, prosperity, and further democratic development of the states of Central Asia serve the strategic interests of the United States and Russia, we pledge transparency and cooperation in our relations with the states of Central Asia. An important step for ensuring their security is to eradicate terrorist activities in Afghanistan once and for all and to assist in the prevention of their reoccurrence."²³ The Joint Declaration of the two presidents on New Strategic Relations between the United States and Russia says: "In Central Asia and the South Caucasus, we recognize our common interests in promoting the stability, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of all the nations of this region. The United States and Russia reject the failed model of 'Great Power' rivalry that can only increase the potential for conflict in those regions."²⁴

Responsibility of Central Asia (*Karimov vs. Nazarbaev*)

I am almost fully convinced that Russia has never doubted not only the West's inability to push it from Central Asia, but also its inability to become the region's dominant force. What remains unclear is **the policy pursued by the independent (particularly from Russia) Central Asian states**. This policy, however, is expected to modify the classical Heartland theory (which I have written about above). But to many people's surprise, this course was not always straight and clear. From time to time, the local countries challenged Russia's dominance, while at others they recognized and generally accepted it.

There is enough evidence of this, Russia's membership in the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) being one of them. It distorted the region's geographic configuration and the structure's political composition. In fact, this reflected not so much Russia's de facto offensive as the Central Asian countries' surrender: they admitted their inability to resolve their disagreements and invited Russia to act as a mediator.²⁵

At the same time, the current disagreement between Russia and America over the region's future is a dual symptom of the budding new world post-Cold War order. On the one hand, the old model of the balance of power in international relations (which appeared to be buried forever) was revived

²³ [http://moscow.usembassy.gov/bilateral/joint_statement.php?record_id=8].

²⁴ [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020524-2.html>].

²⁵ For more detail, see: F. Tolipov, "The Expansion of CACO: A Russian Offensive or a Central Asian Surrender?" available at [www.cacianalyst.org], 1 December, 2004.

as very much needed. On the other, the new Central Asian issue in the Russia-America relations—whether the region becomes democratic or not—has made it clear that geopolitics can distort the democratization policy and cast doubt on it.

Central Asia is surrounded by undemocratic states, which means that the new players of the Central Asian Big Game have been waging a “zero-sum” game, while the regional and extra-regional countries had to follow the “win-win” policy as fully corresponding to the new democratic geopolitics. This created a paradox in Russia’s ideas about the relations between the local countries and the West: while building strategic relations with the West/U.S., Moscow is fairly nervous about the Central Asian countries drawing closer to the West (the phenomenon of America’s military presence in the region is the best confirmation). As member of the G-8, Russia is irritated by the fact that the Caucasus and Central Asia cooperate with NATO; a key SCO member, an associated OIC member, and an invariable participant in the APR summits, Russia did not rejoice at America’s “Greater Central Asia” project. Having done next to nothing to liquidate the seat of terrorism in Afghanistan, Russia criticizes the inability of the international forces (under U.S. and NATO command) to stabilize the situation there.

The democratic agenda should be freed from geopolitical complications. How can this be done? The extra-regional powers’ destructive geopolitics and the geopolitical distortions of local democracy should be rectified in the most constructive manner. The former (geopolitics) cannot be avoided, while the latter (democracy) cannot be discarded. The solution is as follows: the “*geopolitical democracy*” formula should be transformed into the “*democratic geopolitics*” formula.

I have already written about the multi-polarity of the post-Soviet expanse—the time has come to say that it contradicts the “democratic geopolitics” conception. Prominent Russian political figure A. Sobianin has pointed out that Turkmenistan is the region’s only “dark horse.” “It is more than an enigmatic joker, which appeared along with the changes at the very top. It is a strong independent player. It is not the region’s strongest country, but it is found at the unique bifurcation point of a unique point in history when even its tiniest steps might change the trajectory of Kazakhstan, Russian, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan foreign policies. The question is: where will it go?”²⁶ I think that this multi-polarity will not only complicate the already complex and dangerous Big Game; it does not answer Turkmenistan’s long-term interests. It may rebound as soon as Turkmenistan joins the game. The far from simple position of the enumerated countries in the geopolitical game with the world powers is more confirmation of the above. I can only add that Turkmenistan is not alone at this “unique point of bifurcation of a unique point in history”—its Central Asian neighbors and the region as a whole have also reached the point.

There are no “ifs” in history, but let us imagine, for the sake of an argument, how geopolitics would have developed in Central Asia if Uzbekistan’s relations with the United States had not suddenly deteriorated; if Uzbekistan had remained outside the SCO and EurAsEC; if it had remained in the GUUAM; if the CACO had not merged with the EurAsEC, and if Uzbekistan had not allied with the Russian Federation (in fact the half-baked Agreement merely repeats their earlier Agreement on Strategic Partnership). The list of these changes, which were neither logical nor predictable (nor expected), demonstrates their geopolitical anti-American bias. I can go as far as saying that if none of the above had happened, Uzbekistan would have become the Central Asian leader, not because of America’s backing, but because, to quote a Russian poet, it “really forced one to admire it—and never played a shrewder trick.” As a genuine and responsible regional leader, Uzbekistan would have been prepared to fulfill its new mission of the region’s political unification.

²⁶ A. Sobianin, “SShA ne khotiat, chtoby integratsiye Tsentral’noy Azii zanialas Rossia,” available at [www.centrasia.org], 25 July, 2007. Interview by Alexander Evgrafov, 24 July, 2007 (source—Rosbalt).

What the country lost by severing relations with the United States and what it gained by allying with Russia on an anti-American basis deserves special discussion—it seems that the country could have preserved its relations with the former, while improving its relations with the latter. Washington and Moscow have places of their own in Tashkent's foreign policy—its foreign policy regarding each of them does not have to be mutually exclusive. Today, Uzbekistan's foreign policy suggests the following important conclusion.

Its absence and its involvement may influence the region's geopolitical situation in a critical way. To quote Sobianin, it should merely choose the right road at the bifurcation point. Russia was disturbed when Uzbekistan allowed the United States to station its troops on its territory—and breathed again, and even rejoiced, as soon as Uzbekistan drove away the American contingent, together with the American NGOs. Uzbekistan's activity could turn it into a driving force of regional integration; if it prefers to abstain, the driving force will be slowed down in its progress toward integration.

The Central Asian countries are facing **ambiguous perspectives as CIS members**—this is clear. It is equally clear that Moscow's choice of either Nazarbaev or Karimov, on the one hand, and their choice, on the other, is of immense importance. Their personalities are not as important as their policies, their involvement in the Big Game, and their ability to contribute to reforming geopolitical democracy into democratic geopolitics.

President Nazarbaev has managed to use his country's natural resources (energy resources in particular) to his own advantage and to the advantage of his country. Kazakhstan vacillates between the Eurasian, Central Asian, or even pan-Asian (let us recall the surrealistic CICBMA [Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia] idea) biases. The state, which has posed itself the task of becoming the OSCE chairman in 2009, first moved toward democracy by introducing certain democratic changes in April 2007, then immediately retreated by lifting the limit on the number of presidential terms for the incumbent.

At the same time, Kazakhstan's economy demonstrates fantastic achievements. The "Kazakhstani miracle" has already reached Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan, where its investments have already become a factor of economic growth. "Dizzy with success," the country's leaders have posed themselves the task of joining the group of the world's 50 most developed states. Its peacekeeping contingents are involved in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet the country never went as far as Uzbekistan by establishing allied relations with Russia, its immediate neighbor, and never spoilt its relations with the West and America.

Uzbekistan, so far, has failed to elaborate an integral foreign policy doctrine and, instead of a pro-active strategy typical of any strong state that relies on the nation's multi-parameter potential, it preferred re-active tactics. There is no dynamism in Uzbekistan's dealings with the world powers: there are EU sanctions in the wake of the Andijan events of May 2005 instead; in dealing with its Central Asian neighbors, Uzbekistan for some reason selected self-isolation.

The above means that Karimov's vs. Nazarbaev's approach is a choice between *pro-active* and *re-active* policies and the stakes the world leaders are placing on the one or the other in their geopolitical intrigues. No one, or almost no one, is paying attention to the fact that the question of the two key countries' responsibilities for the region as part of the Heartland was ignored. Stakes should be placed on Central Asia as a strategically important region rather than on specific people or personified politics.

Those who talk about Central Asia in geopolitical terms prefer to dwell on the foreign military presence, the West's offensive and Russia's surrender, the struggle over the region's energy resources, etc. The countries are mostly ignored—much is said about them and instead of them. Regrettably, too many local experts, analysts, political scientists, and politicians are caught up in the latest fash-

ions and willingly repeat scholarly and quasi-scholarly ideas about their region coined by others and imposed on them on the academic commodity market.

Does Central Asia have its own interests and what are they? **Its key strategic interests can be described as independence, democracy, and integration**, which formulate the following short- and middle-term tasks:

- restoring the regional structures of the five Central Asian states;
- treating a political alliance as the most important task;
- annulling the visa regime between the five countries;
- harmonizing the constitutions and the laws of the five countries and adopting a Manifesto of a United Central Asia;
- transferring to common external and defensive policies (patterned on European policy) right up to restoring the Central Asian battalion;
- withdrawing from the CIS and establishing relations with the CIS countries on a bilateral basis;
- asking the large world powers for broad international support (à la Marshall Plan for Europe) for implementing large regional economic projects.

Central Asia should, while recognizing its geopolitical interests and Russia's concerns about the foreign military-political and other presence, understand, articulate, and defend *its* (not other countries') interests. In fact, Central Asia has *its own* concerns over the foreign presence in the region that differ from Russia's. Central Asia should stop serving the great powers' interests—and thus discontinue its dependence. This should not be taken to mean that these interests immanently contradict the interests of the local countries: they might even be mutually harmonious. I mean to say that the world **should stop thinking and talking about Central Asia from the point of view of great power geopolitics without thinking and talking from the Central Asian viewpoint at the same time.**

C o n c l u s i o n

I have discussed three approaches to Russia's Central Asian policy: Gorbachev vs. Yeltsin; Putin vs. Bush, and Karimov vs. Nazarbaev. They reflect the three scopes and three levels of the policy pursued by the politicians described above: continental (CIS-wide); global (Russian-American), and regional (Central Asian). The first symbolizes Russia's treatment of the post-Soviet expanse, which in effect is continuing an undemocratic geopolitics; the second reflects the worldwide struggle between the ideas of democracy and geopolitical interests; the third speaks of the inevitable, and unwelcome, result of the combined effects of the first two factors.

The three political trends associated with the two world powers' attitude toward Uzbekistan, as well as its attitude toward them, are equally unwelcome. I have in mind the United States' revisionism; Russia's revanchism; and Uzbekistan's reversionism.²⁷ I mean to say that Washington's revision of its position in relation to Uzbekistan, as well as Moscow's resultant revanche might be caused by Tashkent's retreat and abandonment of its former foreign policy orientation. It has become clear, however, that Uzbekistan's reversionism is inappropriate, not only in relation to Russia and the U.S., but also to its closest neighbors.

²⁷ See: F. Tolipov, "Uzbekistan's Reversionism, America's Revisionism, and Russia's Revanchism," *CACI Analyst*, 22 March, 2006, available at [www.cacianalyst.org].

It seems that American revisionism will not develop further—Washington will merely readjust its strategic course in Central Asia. Today, Washington’s position is a dual one: first, its assessments of the May 2005 Andijan events remain the same; second, the U.S. State Department put forward the Greater Central Asia conception, which means that America is seeking a different, yet active as ever, Central Asian policy.

Moscow’s revanchism is improbable: so far this is confirmed by the efforts of certain Russian analysts and experts to offer a more adequate Central Asian policy.

Recently A. Sobianin wrote something that surprised many. While being aware that Central Asia may grow suspicious of Russia’s neo-imperialist designs, he pointed out that there are two international organizations able to defuse the fears: the SCO and the CICBMA: “There are more members in the CICBMA than in the SCO, therefore it is probably the only international organization that unites all the countries directly or indirectly involved in the Durand Line and Kashmir issues.

“The problems that are unlikely to be resolved (or cannot be resolved at all) at the level of bilateral relations and that are unlikely to be resolved within the Central Asia and Russia community will be easily settled within wider integration projects and large international organizations.”²⁸ I cannot agree with it: the fears of revived Russian imperialism can be quenched not by large international organizations (which themselves might be latently neo-imperialist), but by Russia’s openly democratic geopolitics. It should abandon its desire to preserve the status quo in Central Asia. (As for the CICBMA, I believe it to be a pseudo-mechanism of confidence-building and interaction in Asia, which, as distinct from Europe, is not united. It is fragmented civilizationally, formationally, geopolitically, historically, and religiously. The so-called Durand Line and the Kashmir issue cannot bring together the highly fragmented continent; more than that—many of the CICBMA members are absolutely indifferent to Russia’s imperial policies in Central Asia.)

Great Russia should pursue great policies; today its grandeur can be better illustrated not by its imperial nature, but by its democratic policies, both at home and on the geopolitical stage. Significantly, today Russia no longer looks like a defender of Central Asia—it is Central Asia that is protecting Russia’s southern borders by the very fact of its independent existence, democratic development, and unification. This is what new democratic Russia should really want.

Here are two important comments about the legacy of those who recently left the political scene and of those who will leave it soon.

A. Chernyaev, Mikhail Gorbachev’s former aide, has written the following in his book on perestroika and his former patron: “It is ridiculous, highly provincial, and in general unworthy of Russia to present its democratic foreign policy and its relations with the United States as though they began from scratch, as its present rulers are wont to do.”²⁹ There should be continuity in foreign policy.

I want to say again: Russia at all times has been responsible for the Heartland—this has been its share of responsibility for the world. Today, it shares this responsibility with the newly independent Central Asian states, which means that they should shoulder responsibility for world affairs as well. Are they all aware of this?

²⁸ A. Sobianin, *op. cit.*

²⁹ A. Chernyaev, *op. cit.*

RUSSIA IN CENTRAL ASIA: RETURN

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Overview of the Past

In the 1990s Russia's position in Central Asia became significantly eroded, not so much for economic reasons, as some Russian politicians allege, but because of its grossly misinterpreted national interests.

It has become customary to associate the radical revision of Russia's Central Asian policy with Vladimir Putin's presidency. This is very true, but the events of 2000 were no more than the first steps toward fundamental changes.

In 2005, the sovereign democracy conception marked a turning point in Russia's foreign policy: the country finally placed its sovereignty above its foreign policy constants and began to slowly retreat from its previous devotion to the Western liberal-democratic principles.

Sovereignty, understood as a synonym for the country's political competitiveness, made great changes in Russia's approach to the CIS: it sided with Uzbekistan in its post-Andijan conflict with the West and began pouring much more energy into the SCO and several other projects. The situation that had taken shape by 2004-2005 in the Western vector of Russia's foreign policy and on its southern borders pushed the RF into Asian geopolitics. The U.S.-led military operation in Afghanistan allowed Russia to interfere more openly than before in the Central Asian political processes, which forced China to act accordingly. The Russian Federation could no longer ignore the new realities—the balance of power in the region of Russia's vital interests was on the verge of being upset.

Transformation of Russia's Foreign Policy Paradigm

In view of the changed style of Russia's relations with the key international partners and the very real threats it encountered as soon as it began restoring its international status forced the Russian leaders to readjust the approach and very ideology of Russia's foreign policy. It must stop being reflective: the country badly needs a well-substantiated and maximally long-term foreign policy strategy. This should be done not so much to restore the international balance or create a multi-polar world order: this is a new approach to the old problem of secure borders achieved either by their extension or by at least enlarging the "security zone" around Russia.

Russia's absence from the Near Abroad allowed non-Russian capitals to deeply penetrate into the Central Asian economies, thus shifting the main foreign policy accents of Russia's neighbors in an

unwelcome direction. Today, the Central Asian countries are working hard to pursue multi-vectoral policies, otherwise known as “distance partnership.” It is at this time that the ideologies supported by the national elites of the new post-Soviet states are being radically transformed and pushing the countries further away from Russia. The nationalist discourse has triumphed: from this time on foreign policy is being shaped by national egotism and, on many occasions, serves it badly.

After about fifteen years of chaotic quest for their national identity, the local countries have finally arrived at the “state-centric” model (to borrow the term from J. Rosenau¹) as a matrix determining everything, foreign policies included. All five Central Asian Soviet successor states have armed themselves with this philosophy of state-building, something that Russia approved of to a much greater extent than the foreign policy players who wanted to push the region toward liberal democracy. The non-linear nature of the contemporary political developments is responsible for the diverse models and trajectories of the Central Asian post-communist republics. Some of the regimes pretend to be liberal democracies of the Western type, others are developing into autocracies of hitherto unknown types, while still others are turning out to be hybrids. The non-linear development type is of a general nature, which means that the universal development models acceptable for all countries and nations are nothing more than a myth. When applied to Central Asia, the Western models were soon discredited by the failed reforms, appalling social differentiation, poverty, and political confrontation. More than that: today, the problems of further development in this region cannot be rectified by political technologies. The local elites have already realized that much, therefore Russia’s return is going on against a very favorable background.

Two recent sets of events clearly demonstrated that the “state-centric” model has been completely accepted and has triumphed. First, Uzbekistan’s post-Andijan ruptured strategic partnership with the United States; its joining the EurAsEC and the CSTO, the agreement on allied relations with Russia, and Uzbekistan’s greater involvement in the SCO. Second, the outwardly paradoxical result of the Kyrgyz “revolution” of 2005 that brought Kurmanbek Bakiev to power and spelt the bad failure of America’s policies. For objective and subjective reasons, the new president is pursuing an even more pro-Russian, and pro-Chinese, foreign policy than his predecessor. He is even less predictable than Askar Akaev. Today, Moscow’s seemingly short-term, yet well-substantiated foreign policy looks much more adequate in the Central Asian realities than the West’s aggressive policy and its pseudo-revolutionary technologies. The year 2005 marked a watershed: thanks to its consistent efforts to use its political weight to keep the political processes in the Central Asian republics within “the constitutional framework and national legislation,” Russia acquired new possibilities in the region. The fifteen years of the Euro-Atlantic community’s insistent efforts to influence domestic processes in the local countries now produce nothing but rejection. The Central Asian republics, being viewed as part of the former communist bloc, are believed to be susceptible to the transition to the democracy paradigm² based on the firm conviction that standard schemes and prescriptions initially geared at the requirements of the so-called Western world, when applied without discrimination, can remedy all the ills of any country.³ Having detected the absence of a civil society in the Central Asian countries, the Americans and Europeans set themselves the task of creating it artificially, while the true needs of these countries lay in a different sphere: they needed stronger state institutions to be able to adequately respond to the challenges to their independence.⁴

¹ See: J. Rosenau, “Pre-Theory Revised: World Politics in an Era of Cascading Interdependence,” *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 1, 1984, pp. 3-29.

² See: T. Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 2002, p. 6.

³ See: F. Vielmini, “Rol’ Rossii v opredelenii evropeysko-tsentral’noaziatskikh otnosheniy,” in: *Proekty sotrudnichestva i integratsii dlia Tsentral’noy Azii: sravnitelnyi analiz, vozmozhnosti i perspektivy*, ed. by A.A. Kniazev, Bishkek, 2007, pp. 75-85.

⁴ This is best illustrated by the OSCE, which is perceived in the region as an American tool used for carrying out its geopolitical designs; democratization is another such tool (see: P. Dunay, “The OSCE in Crisis,” *Chaillot Paper*, No. 88,

The post-Soviet inner typological kinship of the models of state and social development born by the shared historical experience has become the foundation on which cooperation between Russia and Central Asia (nearly lost in the 1990s) can be rebuilt. But this can only be a temporary, transitional foundation: the Central Asian elites are obviously unwilling to abandon their shaky status and the regimes' criminalized structure for the sake of democracy. This contradicts Russia's interests: it wants long-term stability in the region and is willing to limit its cooperation, for the sake of modernization of the Central Asian regimes, to the states and international business elites not inclined to build up tension and cause destruction by exporting unsuitable novelties. This is what should serve as the cornerstone of Russia's Central Asian strategy. America's policy for Central Asia based on double standards has already given Russia a chance to retrieve at least some of its former regional allies. The 2005 geopolitical U-turn performed by Uzbekistan is a serious sign of the region's disaffection with the American mission and evidence of Russia's readiness to take part in global projects alternative to the Western ones.

The political systems now functioning in the region are remnants of the Soviet system blended with certain specifics borrowed from the pre-colonial past. The communist ideology was replaced by the ideology of the ethnocratic states (or, in a milder form, "nationally oriented" states of which Kazakhstan is an example), but none of the Central Asian states can boast of a natural rivalry of political forces. In the absence of an ideological basis patterned on the new states' social development needs, the contradiction between the form and content made them even shakier than their communist predecessors. This means that Russia should not only support the sovereignties of its Central Asian partners, but also encourage political readjustments in all of them to help them achieve firmer stability and better efficiency. In fact, Russia's security depends on political stability in all the limitrophes.

In the absence of a long-term and well-substantiated Central Asian strategy, Russia can still draw from the wealth of experience created by its two-centuries-long presence in the region. No matter what, in order to return, Russia must devise absolutely new mechanisms of cooperation and realization of its regional interests. So far, the new and not yet completed conception deals with the tactical mid-term and currently realized tasks: control over the production and transit of Central Asian energy resources to the world markets; preservation and optimization of Russia's military presence in the region designed to forestall the threats coming from radical Islamists; helping the Central Asian regimes strengthen their sovereignties and preventing the "export of democracy;" and looking for a consensus with China's mounting influence in the region and preventing its domination.

Globalization has turned Russia's monopoly presence, and that of any other power for that matter, in any region into a utopia. To promote regional stability, Russia should seek partners to assist in the region's political and economic reconstruction among countries that want to achieve the same. The European Union is a potential partner; in turn, the EU has many logical reasons for choosing Russia as its key partner in Central Asia. If Russia is squeezed out of regional politics, Eurasia might find itself threatened.⁵ So far, nearly everything that the United States and the European Union have initiated for Central Asia's economic and political progress was too obviously anti-Russian: the key actors of international politics remain rivals not yet prepared to effectively cooperate in the region. Any unbiased observer admits that American, European, or any other cooperation and integration projects should embrace not only the south, but also involve the north (Russia), the west (Iran), etc. It is naïve to expect Russia to remain on the curbside: it will promote its interests in the economic, political, cultural,

April 2006). The Europeans approach the Central Asian security issue in a fairly technical way that lacks systemic treatment, while the issue as a long-term phenomenon calls for systemic and integral approaches. Today the European approaches are rejected with a great deal of frustration; more and more often the word "Bolshevist" is applied to the European treatment of the human rights issue, while the term "democracy" has become sort of a swear word—the best illustration of the high level of alienation (see: F. Vielmini, op. cit.). The same author offers a more detailed analysis in his *Continuità post-sovietica, autoritarismo politico e diritti umani in Asia Centrale*, ISPI, Milan, 2007.

⁵ "Interview with A. Rahr. Russia Profile Weekly Experts Panel: Another New Year's Gas War," *Russia Profile*, 12 January, 2007.

and educational spheres of the former Soviet republics, as well as in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and other countries.⁶

The collective security sphere is a natural point where the interests of Russia and the Central Asian republics meet. Neither America, nor Europe, nor China will shoulder the responsibility for Central Asian security. The Americans have come to the region with their own interests in view. China is just learning how to cooperate with the region's states and obviously prefers economic cooperation.

This gives Russia a chance to develop military-political cooperation, the recent history of which is fairly contradictory. Immediately after 1991, Russia's military-political influence in Central Asia and the size of its military presence shrank. Russia lost some of its military bases in the local countries; meanwhile, military-political cooperation remains a priority. The events of 1999-2000 demonstrated that the military threat coming from the Central Asian sector was real and that, despite Russia's diminished influence in the region, it remains instrumental in dealing with its military-political problems. Proceeding from this, Russia can fully restore its presence in the sphere of security. In the absence of sufficient financial resources and the political will of the leaders of any of the Central Asian states to set up the necessary defense, potential military-political alliances and military-technical cooperation are the only effective security mechanisms. The limited military potential cannot be stretched to cover the entire range of military threats and threats of war: this calls for military-political integration and the pooling of forces within the regional collective security systems. All the Central Asian countries (with the exception of Turkmenistan) have demonstrated that they are aware of this by the mere fact of their CSTO membership (the organization functionally best suited to deal with the threats and challenges). One of the central theses of the 2007 Bishkek Declaration of the SCO summit clearly pointed out that the U.S. and NATO are unable to radically improve the situation in the regional security sphere: "Stability and security in Central Asia are best ensured primarily through efforts made by the nations of the region on the basis of the existing regional international associations."⁷

The Economic Factor of Russia's Central Asian Policy

At one time, Andrey Snesarev, one of the founders of the Russian school of geopolitics, wrote: "Today economic conquests go ahead of military victories. It is not the nation that heaps up bayonets that is strong—the nation that holds the nets of economic conquest is stronger."⁸ Currently, Russia is not only restoring its economic presence in the region, but is also strengthening it in a very tangible way. At present, Russia alone can implement large-scale projects by being involved in prospecting, producing, and transporting energy resources, extending military-technical cooperation, etc. which provide an impetus for regional integration. For instance, in 2000-2006, over 40 percent of direct investments in Tajikistan came from Russia.⁹ True, so far, trade and economic relations with the Central Asian countries are of secondary importance for Russia: in 2006, the aggregate share of these countries in Russia's foreign trade turnover was about 3 percent (in China's foreign trade, it was 0.6 per-

⁶ See: V.S. Boyko, "Bol'shaia Tsentral'naia Azia i Rossia: osobennosti istoriko-tsivilizatsionnogo, geopoliticheskogo i ekonomicheskogo vzaimodeystvia," in: *Proekty sotrudnichestva i integratsii dlia Tsentral'noy Azii: sravnitel'nyi analiz, vozmozhnosti i perspektivy*, pp. 50-57.

⁷ [<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav082007a.shtml>].

⁸ *Afganskie uroki: Vyvody dlia budushchego v svete ideynogo nasledia A.E. Snesareva*, Compiled by A.E. Savinkin, Voennyi universitet, Russkiy put, Moscow, 2003, p. 102.

⁹ See: *Regnum*, 6 June, 2007.

cent). Russia's share in Kyrgyzstan's foreign trade was 27.24 percent; in Uzbekistan's, 16.39 percent; and in Kazakhstan's, 18.87 percent. These figures invariably keep Russia at the top of the list of foreign trade partners. On average, in 2006 the Russia's share in the foreign trade turnover of the Central Asian countries was about 17 percent (China's share was about 12 percent).¹⁰

Russia's involvement in Central Asian politics and economics at the macro-, regional, and microregional levels (cooperation between territories, regions, business structures, educational and research institutions, etc.) is an important imperative conducive to the new climate, cooperation, and even integration on a bilateral or multilateral basis in the entire Central Asian region, including China's Xinjiang and Russia's Altai and Southern Siberia. Russia's interests can be harmonized with those of the United States, the activities of which have, for several years, been irritating not only the inveterate patriots, but also the pragmatically minded people. A. Bogaturov has the following to say on this score: "The issue of Russia's greater role in ensuring the U.S.'s energy needs is no longer purely theoretical. So far the northern route of deliveries of Russian energy resources to the United States via Murmansk attracts more attention than the southern (south Siberian, to be more exact) route. If, however, America's efforts to create the transportation routes through which energy resources will be moved from the center of the Eurasian continent to the south prove successful, it might become critically important for Russia to join the project."¹¹ This argument has only one, but important, flaw: America's plans to move energy resources from Central Asia are prompted by political, rather than economic, considerations. The U.S. is resolved to create alternatives to the Russian transit and the Chinese vector of fuel deliveries from Central Asia. The operating cost of any of the Western alternatives will be higher than that of the Russian variant, therefore involvement in the pro-Western projects will demand much greater investments and much greater guarantees from the Central Asian states.¹²

The Cultural-Civilizational Aspect

The history of Russia's influence in Asia is a history of certain elements of the European civilization in the region. There is an obvious common interest in preserving the Russian language as a

¹⁰ See: V.V. Paramonov, A.V. Stokov, "Ekonomicheskoe prisutstvie Rossii i Kitaia v Tsentral'noy Azii—klyuchevoy vopros dlia budushchego EvrAzES i ShOS," in: *Proekty sotrudnichestva i integratsii dlia Tsentral'noy Azii: sravnitel'nyi analiz, vozmozhnosti i perspektivy*, pp. 153-160.

The average regional index of Russia's investment activities is decreasing because of the foreign investments in Kazakhstan's oil and gas complex: by the beginning of 2007, the volume of American investments reached \$13.8 billion, or 30 percent of the total direct foreign investments in Kazakhstan. At the same time, Russian companies are responsible for over half of foreign investments in Uzbekistan's oil and gas sector; there are over 450 JVs in Uzbekistan with Russian capital. During President Putin's visit to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in May 2007, the two Central Asian presidents confirmed that cooperation with Russia in the oil and gas sphere was a priority. President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan was the most eloquent: "Kazakhstan is wholeheartedly devoted to the idea that, even if not all the oil and gas produced, at least its larger part should be moved across Russian territory." It was also agreed to increase the load of the transit oil pipeline of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (connecting northwestern Kazakhstan and Russia) from the present 29 million to 40 million tons. There were certain shifts in attracting Russian investments and the resources of Gazprom to maintain and develop gas extraction in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The main event took place on 12 May when the heads of Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan signed a declaration on building a Caspian gas pipeline with a capacity of 10 billion c m and on extending and modernizing the Central Asia-Center pipeline system. The document obligated the sides to present, before 1 September, feasibility studies, and intergovernmental and commercial agreements on a consortium. It is expected that by 2014 the gas transportation capacities will rise from the present 60 billion to 90 billion c m (see: A. Sopianin, M. Shibusov, "Dozhdiomsia li rossisko-kazakhstanskoy global'noy ekspansii?" *Respublika. Delovoe obozrenie*, Almaty, 25 May, 2007).

¹¹ A. Bogaturov, "Indo-sibirskiy koridor v strategii kontrterrorizma," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 24 October, 2005, p. 14.

¹² The former will cross the mountains or cross seas, while the second prove to be much shorter. For these reasons, the bypassing routes invariably turn out to be much more expensive. For example, the cost of the trans-Caspian gas pipeline and the still missing sectors of the Nabucco line are estimated at \$10 billion, while the Russian project for modernizing and extending the Central Asian gas pipeline is estimated at \$1 billion (see: A. Sopianin, M. Shibusov, op. cit.).

passkey to the world culture.¹³ It is not merely an element that brings the local nations closer and facilitates their interaction. Recent history has demonstrated that, deprived of an educational system based on the Russian, the Central Asian nations proved unable to respond to the globalization challenges. The loss of the Russian tongue is directly responsible for the degradation of the Central Asian societies, the spread of primitive Islamism and, in any case, the drift away from the European principles.¹⁴ The new nature of the Russia-Central Asia relations leaves no space for the ideological constructs (very much in fashion in the 1990s) that spoke of unequal relations with Russia in the past and even “exploitation.”

As distinct from the 19th and 20th centuries, Russia is no longer exerting demographic pressure on Central Asia today. The wide-scale migration flows from the Central Asian countries to Russia testify that it needs Central Asian human resources. This suggests that integration with Russia should be peaceful and non-violent, very much as it was in the past. There is no truth to the thesis that Russia and the Russians, due to their strong “guilt complex” about the numerous faults and excesses of the imperial and Soviet periods, cannot be involved on an equal footing in Central Asian affairs. Millions of Russian/Soviet citizens, ethnic Russians, were only too aware, probably to an even greater extent, of the internal colonialism in social and other spheres and of the disdain with which the Center treated the peripheries.¹⁵

Today, Central Asia, even in its most distorted interpretation of the 1990s, is moving to Russia—millions of ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks and members of other local nationalities have already moved there forever or, at least, for a long time, or as seasonal workers. They are a connecting link or even a lifeline between their homelands and Russia. In Russia, especially in the southern border regions and territories, Asian diasporas are gradually developing into sustainable national communities and are even acquiring certain status privileges and legal rights.

Russia, which developed as an empire and a world state, cannot abandon the strategy of a world power. It will perish if it abandons its traditional policy of a world player and will thus endanger the outside world, not only because Europe depends economically on Russia to a great extent and cannot escape this dependence. If the policy of minimal sufficiency gains the upper hand in Russia, the Russian mentality will inevitably develop a bias toward nationalism, which will push the country toward an ethnocratic state. This is highly dangerous. The symptoms can already be detected: nationalism and phobias of all kinds (ethnic, religious, interregional, race, etc.) are on the upsurge. This phenomenon is not limited to Russia alone—by the beginning of the 21st century, the world was left without its familiar mobilizing ideologies (socialism, democracy, etc.).

The ideological roots of what is going on in Russia are found in the global humiliation of the Russian nation and Russia as a whole, which, as the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, was one of the world’s leaders. The country’s collapse placed the Russians in a very ambiguous position: accustomed to being the leader, they are suffering from an “identity crisis.” This is prompting energetic or even violent defense of their identity and an active quest for its best characteristics. The situation is complicated by the fact that not all those coming to Russia from the former Soviet republics are law-abiding citizens capable of adapting to the Russian environment. Not all of them wish to adapt themselves; some probably cannot because of culturological reasons. Meanwhile, public opinion is not looking at the details: in Ekaterinburg, for example, the negative attitude toward the Tajik drug dealers has spread to the Tajik diaspora as a whole. Nationalism and xenophobia have objective economic (the region is depressed), social (mass unemployment and particularly latent unemployment), and historical reasons. At all times, provincial Russia responded acutely to the threat of disintegration and

¹³ See: E. Abdullaev, “Uzbekistan between Traditionalism and Westernization,” in: *Central Asia at the End of Transition*, ed. by B. Rumer, M.E. Sharpe, New York, London, 2005, pp. 267-68.

¹⁴ See: F. Vielmini, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ See: V.S. Boyko, *op. cit.*

loss of identity and always sided with those who articulated these threats. In any case, we should talk not of ethnic conflicts but, rather, of ethnic tension, which has not reached its critical level. The problem itself must be comprehended in order for Russia's multicultural society and multicultural state to evolve in the right direction. This is absolutely justified by the country's history—it has been and remains polyethnic. Today it is the only one of the Soviet successor states to reject the ethnocentric model. A new ethnonational structure is coming into being in Russia's Asian part and in some of the central regions (particularly in large cities and the capitals) with obvious Central Asian features and forms of life, residual, renovating, or convergent. These, mainly spontaneous, processes should be complemented with purposeful efforts aimed at developing regional, trans-border, and other contacts.¹⁶

Labor migration makes Central Asia dependent on Russia: in 2006 alone, labor migrants from the CIS countries wired home over \$3 billion and took over \$10 billion in cash out of the country. The aggregate annual income of labor migrants was \$20 billion. For Russia, which is in need of workers, these figures, as an index of hypothetical economic damage, are absolutely unimportant, while for the countries that receive the migrants' money (particularly Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), these sums are all-important. Muzaffar Sharipov, who heads the Information-Resource Center for Labor Migrants of Tajikistan, has admitted: "Russia remains the main labor market for Tajik guest workers." Since the beginning of 2007, writes he, over 630,000 left Tajikistan to earn money elsewhere. "According to our information, about 90 percent of them went to Russia's regions, while a little more than 40,000 of our labor migrants went to Kazakhstan."¹⁷ The money that labor migrants send back home to Tajikistan from Russia is twice as much as the republic's budget; the figure for Kyrgyzstan is lower, but in both cases the fact that labor migration relieves social tension, with which the ineffective economies of both republics can barely cope, is all-important.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The Central Asian countries have not yet chosen more or less consistent foreign policies in relation to all the geopolitical players, Russia included. This is preventing any sustainable partnership between them and Russia. This vagueness is justified by the euphemism about the so-called "multi-vectoral" policy that became a dogma in the 1990s and is put forward every time an explanation has to be given for the far-from-consistent policies suggested by the objective and subjective, but mostly short-term, interests that rarely, or never, serve genuinely national interests. The local countries have no long-term strategies in any sphere of cooperation (political, economic, or any other).

Russia's, and the Russians', desire to remain in Asia, and Central Asia in particular, is largely explained by the old philosophical and political, as well as new specific political, ideas (the Asianism of E. Ukhtomskiy or the Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism of the 1920s and 1990s).¹⁸ Today this process is going on under the impact of more important factors—geopolitical, geo-economic, demographic, migrational, and others, even though it is not simply a product of globalization. Central Asia's borders are fairly flexible—today, as in the past, they do not coincide with the state borders—they are frontiers of a cultural-civilizational area,¹⁹ at which, in the case of Russia, the Slavic Christian and the (predominantly) Turkic-Muslim worlds meet.

¹⁶ See: *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Regnum*, 25 July, 2007. According to the Shark Research Center, 94.7 percent of the total flow of labor migrants goes to Russia; 2.4 percent to Kazakhstan, and 2.9 percent each to Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. The real unemployment level in Tajikistan is 11.3 percent; urban unemployment is 13.2 percent; agricultural unemployment, 10.9 percent; the share of unemployed among the young people is the largest—68.9 percent.

¹⁸ See: D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Aziatskiy soblazn Rossii," *Kosmopolis*, No. 3, 2002/2003 [URL: <http://risa.ru/cosmopolis/archives/2/shimmelpenninck.html>].

¹⁹ See: V.S. Boyko, *op. cit.*

Russia has always been a very specific imperial project deprived of any commercial sense: the empire as a huge territorial-spatial complex was set up for political considerations in an effort to place Russia in the center of a vast, well-ordered, and well-protected expanse. Russia moved to Asia to protect its territory rather than being driven by certain syncretic Eurasian doctrines that speak of Russia's mission as "keeping together the vast Eurasian expanse."

This approach presupposed much more organic mutual penetration of the metropolitan country and the colonies than, say, in the case of Britain, another great empire. It was a purely commercial project with numerous domains scattered across the world and far removed from the metropolitan country. They were "branches of a huge firm" called the United Kingdom. When the project began losing money, it was closed down.

As a result, Russia's role in the colonization of Central Asia was a systemic one; it was a regulator of the main regional balancing tools. Besides, Russia has been, and remains, the most effective (even if merely potential in recent years) vector of modernization for the Central Asian political systems and the most acceptable example of political culture. In the Central Asian countries, the state structures play an important political role. Russia is a vector of orientation, if not toward democracy in the classical sense, then toward greater pluralism inside the Central Asian political systems.

This background supplies the Russian post-imperial project in the widest sense with the right of continued existence. Russia's continental profile as a state does not allow it to be anything but a great power, a status it is rapidly restoring. This explains why no more or less important international problems can be resolved without Russia and contrary to Russia; this is even truer of the problems in the region, which, despite the post-Soviet losses, remains a sphere of Russia's national interests and where it has preserved the largest number of factors of influence.

THE RUSSIAN FACTOR IN CENTRAL ASIAN GEOPOLITICS IN THE CONTEXT OF IRANIAN-AMERICAN CONTRADICTIONS

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Russia's Central Asian policy is one of the most debatable and pertinent issues that have been in the center of attention for some time now. In fact, it has acquired additional overtones in the context of the continued Iranian-American confrontation, which affects Central

Asian geopolitics and the Eurasian approach dominating Russia's foreign policy (which presupposes Russia-IRI partnership in Central Asia). It is absolutely clear that the nature, content, and pace of

Russia's involvement in the region, as well as cooperation between the two countries, directly depend on the state and level of Iranian-American relations.

The U.S. in Russia's Geopolitics in Central Asia

Russia's devotion to the idea of multi-polar approaches to international relations is well known.¹ In this context, its access to Central Asia's energy resources and control over the transportation and communication corridors make it one of the leading centers of power of Eurasia. Its Central Asian geostrategy presupposes:

- maintaining stability in all spheres—political, military, economic, humanitarian, and legal;
- reintegrating the region on the basis of a new system of energy transportation and water communication across the Eurasian expanse;
- developing a single economic zone, of which Central Asia will be a part;
- moving Russian companies to key positions in the Caspian;
- strengthening its leadership in the emerging system of interstate political and economic relations in Central Asia, etc.

E. Kozhokin, Director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Research, has written in this connection: "Russia needs political, economic, and social stability in the Central Asian region" and pointed out that Central Asia has an important role to play in Russia's economy.² Russia treats opposition to the radical extremism that threatens its stability, southern borders, and territorial integrity as a priority. For this reason, and to ensure its geopolitical interests, Moscow is striving to play an important role in Afghanistan's post-conflict stabilization.

Russia's intention to establish control over the Central Asian energy routes in order to promote its political and economic interests has already clashed with America's energy-related plans.

The counterterrorist operation and the intricacies of the emerging system of international relations demand that Washington devise a more balanced and more flexible approach to its relations with Moscow.

For example, relatively recently, certain American experts argued in private that Russia needed stability in Central Asia and would play a certain role in the region, but would never develop into the key foreign factor because of its economic weakness. They added that Moscow treated its economic cooperation with Europe as a priority, which meant that it would never develop into a foreign policy obstacle for the Central Asian states. It was believed that the problem of Russia's military-political partnership with Iran could be dismissed as unimportant, since the two countries would find it hard to agree over the Caspian issue.

¹ See: E. Primakov, "Mir bez sverkhderzhav. Mnogopoliarnyi mir i shansy SShA," *Izvestia*, 22 August, 2003.

² See: E.M. Kozhokin, "Rossia krovno zainteresovana v stabil'nosti v Tsentral'no-Aziatskom regione," *Analyticheskoe obozrenie* (Astana), No. 2, 2002, pp. 3, 4.

Today, however, when the U.S.-Russian rivalry has been accelerating, while the U.S.-Iranian contradictions remain unsettled, the cooperation between Russia and Iran looks like a counterweight to America's geopolitical and economic interests in the region. In January 2007, Tehran received Top-M1 anti-aircraft missile systems under an agreement signed back in December 2005,³ which added to Iran's ability to oppose the United States in a possible armed clash.

On the other hand, Western experts tend to ignore the disagreements between Russia and the European Union intensified by Russia's policies in the energy sphere,⁴ as well as their contradictions over the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and the American anti-missile plans in Europe.

The EU leaders are calling on Moscow to side with the international community over Iran's nuclear issue: "It is in Moscow's own best interests to join the international community in trying to resolve the nuclear standoff with Iran... its rapidly advancing missile program [threatens] not only the Middle East; [it also poses] great danger to Europe—and to Russia."⁵

In its dealings with Moscow, Washington is guided by the threat of international terrorism emanating from the Middle East, which America treats as its absolute priority. American experts say time and again: "The United States has an interest in a Russia that is prosperous, stable, and can be an international partner in dealing with very serious problems like nuclear proliferation, terrorism, the future of energy, and global warming. The U.S. and Europe, Japan, and for that matter, China, need a Russia that is secure internally and politically capable of cooperating."⁶

In this context, continued Russian-American cooperation in Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction and in liquidation of other potential seats of instability in Central Asia is regarded as a priority, which calls for a continued constructive dialog and partnership between the two countries, while the U.S. should take into account Moscow's long history of cooperation with Central Asia and its leading role in the already established regional security systems—the CSTO and SCO.

Constructive cooperation may allow the United States to cut short Moscow's attempts to set up a multi-sided anti-American coalition. There is the opinion⁷ that the official visit of the RF foreign minister to Iran in March 2003 and Russia's more active diplomatic efforts in Asia (Central Asia included) can be interpreted as the first steps toward such a coalition. The strategic alliance with Russia consolidated in 2001 allowed the American administration not only to neutralize the Iranian-Russian defense cooperation spearheaded against America's interests, but also caused very logical shifts in Russia's Caspian policy (it started looking for possible involvement in the BTC project).⁸ American experts are convinced that Russia is developing into one of America's key partners in the energy sphere.

In recent years, Moscow too has come to a conclusion that "anti-Americanism and anti-NATO feelings might reduce Russia's national interests to a political zero by depriving it of a possibly strong position in the West-East and North-South system of relations."⁹ For the same reason, America's

³ See: D. Zhuikov, "Iran poluchil shchit/Kupiv u Rossii zenitno-raketnye komplekсы piatogo pokolenia 'Top-M1'," *RBK-Daily*, 26 January, 2007.

⁴ See: Yi. Schleifer, "Questions Cloud Turkish-EU Energy Cooperation," available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org>], 12 June, 2007; B. Yunanov, "Evropa poluchit odnu trubu. Glavnaia kollizia otnosheniy Rossia-ES reshena v Tsentrazii," *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 19, 19 May, 2007.

⁵ E. von Klaeden, "Russia's Interests are not with Tehran," *The International Herald Tribune*, 8 March, 2007.

⁶ *Washington ProFile*, 7 February, 2007-23 June, 2007 (see also: *Washington ProFile*, 14 June, 2007).

⁷ See: J. Bransten, "Russia: Ivanov in Iran Amid Warming Bilateral Ties," *RFE/RL*, 11 March, 2003.

⁸ See: "Rossia mozhet prisoedinit'sia k realizatsii proekta stroitel'stva nefteprovoda iz Azerbaidzhana v Turtsiiu 'Baku-Ceyhan'," *Strana.Ru*, 25 January, 2002; C. Marjorie, "The Deadly Pipeline War. US Afghan Policy Driven by Oil Interests," *Jurist*, 8 December, 2001, available at [<http://www.jurist.law.pitt.edu>].

⁹ A. Ulunian, "'Moskva-Pekin' v Tsentral'noy Azii: novaia stadia regional'nogo sopernichestva," *Rossiyskie vesti*, No. 23, 23-29 June, 2004 [<http://www.CentrAsia.Ru/newsA>] (see also: S. Blank, "Russia Mulls Measures to Check Chinese Influence in Central Asia," available at [<http://www.CentrAsia.Ru/newsA>] 29.07.2004).

presence in Central Asia, which keeps extremist Islam away and serves as a potential counterweight to China's mounting influence, is in Russia's interests. In addition, strange as it may seem, America's control over local oil resources fortifies Russia's position as an independent supplier of fuel to Europe.¹⁰

However, the new level of Russia-American relations does not mean that the elements of confrontational thinking will disappear; the same applies to the sides' rivalry over control of energy resources and transportation routes in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This is largely conditioned by America's continued military presence in Turkey, Georgia, Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and Afghanistan. Today Washington is putting pressure on the Iranian and Iraqi oil sectors, which means that it can push the regional economy in the desired direction.

The political changes in the Caspian zone and Moscow's stronger position there forced the United States to readjust its Caspian policy: today it is seeking decentralized pipeline networks with numerous alternatives and diversified import of energy fuels. Its economic and geopolitical interests, however, remain the same: it wants the oil companies to bypass Russia and the IRI when moving oil to the world markets. It is precisely for this reason that the pipelines which cross Azerbaijan and Georgia before reaching Turkey, and the BTC gas pipeline are still the main instruments of geopolitical rivalry with Moscow.¹¹ The future of these projects depends on the extent Kazakhstan is prepared to use these lines. Today, both lines are used for Azeri-produced fuels—Russia's energetic efforts turned away the oil and gas flows originating in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Washington, which placed its stakes on Turkey in its Central Asian policy, has to admit that Ankara and Tehran are drawing closer to a certain extent.¹² In an effort to make his country the main energy corridor to Europe through the trans-Caspian gas pipeline, Erdoğan's Cabinet is not excluding the possibility of Iran's involvement.¹³ Ankara is also actively involved in the project for moving Iranian and Turkmenian gas to Europe across Turkey, which, it is convinced,¹⁴ will allow Europe to become independent of alternative gas suppliers. These geo-economic trends might come to the fore in Washington's Central Asian strategy if its relations with Tehran improve. Meanwhile, the United States is no longer looking at Turkey as a reliable and acceptable partner when it comes to transporting energy resources to Europe.

In an effort to tip the balance of interests in its favor, the United States is trying to re-orientate Central Asia toward Southern Asia through a new electrical grid that will connect Central and Southern Asia. With these plans in view, the U.S. State Department acquired the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

The constructive cooperation between the United States and Moscow on several mutually interesting problems started by the counterterrorist campaign did not alleviate Moscow's concern over the mounting American presence in the region. In Russia there are two predominant approaches to the issue:

- (a) the Eurasian–anti-American, which reflects the prevailing moods and
- (b) the Western-oriented.¹⁵

¹⁰ See: S. Lopatnikov, "SShA ochen' neobkhodima kaspyskaia neft'," *Argumenty i fakty*, 18 August, 2004.

¹¹ See: J. Burke, "The United States is Ill-Prepared to Wage a New Cold War," available at [http://www.eurasianet.org], 8 May, 2006.

¹² See: G. Yuldasheva, "Ankara's Geopolitical Interests in Central Asia in the Context of Iranian-American Contradictions," *Khalkaro munosabatlar* (Tashkent), No. 3, 2005, pp. 28-32 (in Uzbek).

¹³ See: N. Birch, "Turkey Acts to Expand Caspian Basin Energy Presence," *Eurasianet*, 2 March, 2007.

¹⁴ See: "Iran i Turkmenia dogovorilis' o postavkakh v Evropu po gazoprovodu Nabucco 30 milliardov kub m gaza v god," *RBC*, 16 July, 2007.

¹⁵ See: N. Kuzmin, «Central Asia after the Operation in Afghanistan,» *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (19), 2003, p. 130.

In recent times, the number of Russian experts¹⁶ who resolutely object to confrontation with Washington has been steadily growing; they suggest that joint American-Russian bases should be set up in Central Asia under the Russia-NATO Council as the most effective anti-terrorist lever.

Today, however, President Putin's Cabinet is resolved to protect its interests in Central Asia, and Russian politicians are convinced that their country can undermine America's influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. They hope that Russia's increasing economic influence there might help to promote its geopolitical interests in these regions. It is often said that the protracted crisis in Iraq is distracting America's attention away from Central Asia, while Russia, according to certain assessments, has become much more purposeful and much more active in the region.

Moscow is very concerned about America's possible invasion of Iran scheduled for 2006-2007. Russian experts¹⁷ hoped that new European investors in the Caspian might decrease the military threat to Iran. But so far this has not happened.

Russia has thrown all of its political and economic advantages into the game to fortify its regional position and to play the key role in transporting Kazakh oil. The EurAsEC, which after the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan events in Uzbekistan got its second wind, is Moscow's most powerful political resource. There is the opinion¹⁸ that the EurAsEC summit of 15-17 August, 2006 may change the course of geopolitical rivalry for control over the local energy resources. It initiated a customs union and a common energy market in order to prevent Central Asia's American-inspired reorientation toward Southern Asia. In this context, the future of the relations inside the EurAsEC will prove decisive for global energy security.

Iran is still the main stumbling block in the Russian-American relations even though both countries are seeking compromises. The main condition for the U.S.-RF partnership is discontinuation of Russian-Iranian military-technical cooperation (including supplies of nuclear equipment).

Moscow insists on its continued cooperation with Iran in Bushehr. Experts emphasized that a decision from Moscow to withdraw from this project, which is under the rigid control of the International Atomic Energy Agency, might provoke Iran to acquire possession of nuclear weapons. Russia's assistance has been checking this tendency and demonstrating the possibility of Iran using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Moscow is obviously convinced that Iran's relations with Russia are objectively strengthening the pragmatists' position on the Iranian domestic scene and neutralizing the radical Islamist approaches.¹⁹ In the context of the counterterrorist struggle, however, Iran's nuclear status contradicts Russia's security interests. In fact, it is not the Iranian-Russian nuclear partnership that is the issue: Iran's geostrategically key location in the very center of the emerging Eurasian network of transportation and pipeline routes originating in Central Asia is the main attraction. Any country, be it the United States or the Russian Federation, that can draw Iran into its sphere of influence will simultaneously acquire control over the energy sources and transportation corridors of the Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia. This will mean global superiority in the new system of international relations.

This is why, besides trying to preserve its geopolitical domination over Washington in the zone of its interests, Moscow is saving its friendly relations with Tehran as a counterweight to America's policy and a chance of channeling the Caspian policy in the right direction.

¹⁶ See: I. Torbakov, "Rossia-SShA-Tsentrāl'naia Azia: uzel zaviazvaetsia. Mnenia rossiyskikh ekspertov," available at [<http://www.CentrAsia.Ru/newsA>], 1 September, 2004.

¹⁷ See: Blizhaishie 730 dney stanut perelomnymi dlia iuzhnoy strategii Rossii," *Analiticheskaia gruppy ANN*, Moscow, 13 December, 2005, available at [<http://www.iran.ru>].

¹⁸ See: S. Blagov, I. Torbakov, "V tsentre vnimania na sammite EvrAzES byli voprosy energetiki, bezopasnosti i svobodnoy trgovli," *Eurasianet*, 18 August, 2006.

¹⁹ See: E. Primakov, "Iran: What's in Store? Situation Analysis," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 2, April-June 2003, available at [<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/numbers/3/481.html>].

The Iranian Factor in Russia's Central Asian Geopolitics

Iran and Russia, two regional powers, are primarily brought closer by their geopolitical priorities in Central Asia, their historical, scientific, cultural, defense, and economic ties contributing to their cooperation. Russia's and Iran's desire to stand opposed to Washington's attempts to keep them away from the Caspian oil projects is no less important.

On the whole, as is said in Tehran,²⁰ Russia's "relations with Iran are playing the central role in the basin of the 'Greater Middle East' (the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean). Iran may prove instrumental in ensuring stability and security in the CIS countries to the south of Russia" and in its Muslim regions. In this context, Tehran is not excluding the possibility of a cooperation structure with Russia in the gas sphere.²¹

Most of the expert community believes that Iran has its own long-term geopolitical designs in the Middle East, which have nothing to do with Moscow. This can be judged from the diversification of Tehran's foreign policy and economic preferences. "Four big oil companies purchased the tender documents of 17 oil blocks in Iran, said National Iranian Oil Company's (NIOC) exploration manager here on Friday. ...The whole blocks attract investments worth at least €46 million."²²

In addition to the above-mentioned TCG partnership with Ankara, Tehran is looking into possible deliveries of natural gas to Syria via Turkey and Iraq.²³ The continued efforts of Iran and the United States to set up a bilateral dialog²⁴ belong to the same sphere: there is the opinion that a dialog may start cooperation between Washington and Tehran in the sphere of regional security in the Middle East and in Iraq in particular.

As soon as Russia and the United States signed the Strategic Partnership Treaty, the Iranian parliament voiced the opinion that Russia would alter its Mid-Eastern policy and that it was actively pursuing its own interests.²⁵ On the other hand, the RF and IRI remain rivals in the Caspian—they have not yet agreed on the sea's division into national sectors, or on the main oil route from the region.²⁶

At the same time, Iran doubts that Russian-American cooperation is viable, there is the opinion that two possible scenarios of this cooperation are not in Russia's interests: either an alliance between Russia and America, or confrontation between Moscow and the Washington-led West. "Under the first scenario, Russia will no longer be a regional force, while the United States will consistently weaken it. Under the second scenario, Russia will have not enough potential to stand opposed to the West and will be pestered by grave economic and political problems."²⁷ Moscow obviously thinks the same, which is amply testified by the recent geopolitical trends in Central Asia.

The Iranian-American confrontation in the post-Iraq period and Iran's isolation on the Caspian issue are forcing the country's leaders to demonstrate more flexibility in regional policy and remain

²⁰ See: N. Sagafi-Ameri, "Politika bezopasnosti Rossii," *Amu-Darya* (Tehran), No. 6, Fall 2000, pp. 17-18.

²¹ See: "Ali Hamanei: Iran i Rossia mogut sozdat' svoy 'gazovyi' OPEC," *RIA Novosti*, 29 January, 2007.

²² "Four Oil Giants Purchase Tender Documents of Iran's 17 Blocks," *Mehr News Agency*, 16 March, 2007.

²³ See: Tegeran planiruet postavliat' prirodnyi gaz v Siriiu cherez territorii Turtsii i Iraka, available at [http://www.iran.ru], 14 March, 2007.

²⁴ See: J. Hughes, "The Possibility of Easing Tension between the US and Iran," available at [http://www.csmonitor.com], 14 March, 2007.

²⁵ See: S. Blagov, "Vostok-Zapad: Rossia v poiskakh energeticheskoy fortuny," *Eurasianet*, 8 June, 2002.

²⁶ See: D.H. Bavand, "Pravovoy rezhim Kaspiyskogo moria: obzor masshtabov ekologii i bezopasnosti," *Amu-Darya* (Tehran), No. 11, Winter-Spring 2002, pp. 5-41.

²⁷ M.A. Vahidi, "Voennoe prisutstvie SShA v Tsentral'noy Azii: reaktsia Rossii," *Amu-Darya* (Tehran), No. 12, Summer 2002, pp. 98-100.

loyal to their alliance with Russia in the interests of their own security and as a possible counterweight to America's Central Asian policy.

Any unbiased observer will agree that in the context of bitter geopolitical and geo-economic rivalry with the United States in Central Asia and the Middle East, cooperation with Iran, even at the expense of a compromise in the Caspian and Bushehr, is Moscow's only option. The sides are fully aware that they should join forces to pull the Central Asian states onto their side: "Such cooperation will neutralize interference of supra-regional forces in the region."²⁸ This obviously means the United States. It explains, to a certain extent, the noticeable acceleration of such mutually advantageous regional projects as the international transport North-South corridor, the Astara-Gazvin-Anzali-Bandar Abbas railway, and the North-South fiber-optic communication line, which in future might promote economic integration of the Central Asian countries.

In the summer of 2004, both sides confirmed their readiness to strengthen their partnership up to and including contacts and consultations on Iran's peaceful nuclear program, which allowed the Russian Federation to act as an intermediary between the IRI and the West.²⁹ Today, aside from all the debatable issues in the continued Iranian-Russian dialog on Bushehr, Tehran insists³⁰ that it is still willing to continue its strategic partnership with Moscow in many spheres, the nuclear sphere included.

Russia's intention to join the OIC is a practical step toward stronger relations with Iran as one of the OIC's influential members and as an OPEC leader. Moscow intends to use its OIC membership as a counterweight to America's influence in the Islamic world in general and in the Muslim oil and gas exporters in particular.

The two partners are working toward neutralizing China, another of Moscow's rivals. Since the mid-1990s, Russia and China have been talking about building, together with Iran, the so-called pan-Asian continental oil bridge, a network of pipelines that will connect the Russian and Central Asian fuel energy producers with Chinese, and possibly also Korean and Japanese, customers. In fact, closer cooperation between Moscow, Beijing, and the Central Asian capitals within the SCO and potentially Tehran will increase Central Asian security.

After a series of unproductive talks with Iran, the Russian Federation decided to move the Iranian nuclear file to the U.N. Security Council and try to alleviate its potentially harsh decisions: strict anti-Iranian sanctions will also cripple Russia's interests. Analysts believe³¹ that the Russian diplomats were merely trying to delay a too harsh resolution and to convince Iran to resume the moratorium on uranium enrichment and to return to the negotiation table. Moscow is doing its best to remove the Bushehr and other related projects (such as nuclear fuel deliveries for the Bushehr nuclear power station) from any additional anti-Iranian sanctions. According to Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov, this does not mean that "Russia has abandoned Iran,"³² it merely wants to avoid an armed conflict and preserve its geostrategic long-term partner relations with Iran.

²⁸ "Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i Irana 'neytralizuet vmeshatel'stvo nadregional'nykh sil v etom regione," *RIA Novosti*, 22 July, 2003.

²⁹ See: "Rossiiskiy ekspert o probleme 'iadernogo dos'e Irana," *Golos Rossii*, 1 August, 2005, available at [<http://www.vor.ru>]; "Lavrov: peregovory s Iranom ne sorvany. Fragmety stenogrammy vystuplenia i otvetov na voprosy SMI ministra inostrannykh del Rossii S.V. Lavrova po itogam peregovorov s ministrom inostrannykh del Palestinskoy natsional'noy administratsii N. Kudvoy," Moscow, 25 August, 2005, available at [<http://iranatom.ru/news>].

³⁰ See: "Iran i Rossia uregulirovali vopros o finansirovani stroitel'stva AES 'Bushehr'," *IRNA*, 9 March, 2007, available at [www.iran.ru]; "Iran to Offer Russia New Financial Proposal on Bushehr Nuclear Plant," *Mehr News Agency*, 10 March, 2007; "Iran Denies Russia's Claim on Debt for Bushehr Plant Completion," *IRNA*, 15 March, 2007.

³¹ See: M. Zygar', I. Safronov, K. Lantratov, "Moskva gotovit plan evakuatsii svoikh spetsialistov iz Irana," *Kommersant*, 13 January, 2006.

³² A. Samigullina, "Rossia ostavit Iran naedine s OON," *Gazeta.Ru*, 13 January, 2006.

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This means that in the near future the international situation in Central Asia will be shaped by the interaction among the three main regional actors—the United States, Russia, and Iran.

Moscow needs time to complete its geopolitically highly advantageous transportation and pipeline strategy and fortify its regional position. Therefore, it is profiting from the slack American-Iranian confrontation, a military clash being highly unwelcome.

Continued international tension around the Iranian “nuclear file” and America’s possible military actions against Iran will not only undermine Russia’s Caucasian-Caspian and Central Asian strategy, but will also destabilize the Muslim regions of the Russian Federation. This is forcing Moscow to support the Euro-Atlantic community in its efforts to put pressure on Iran. The Russian Federation, however, is not prepared to abandon its Iranian strategy, the results of which will depend to a certain extent on the Central Asian countries’ harmonized position on this issue.

Central Asia, in turn, appreciates Russia’s military-political and scientific-cultural potential, economic infrastructure, and material and technical possibilities, which can be used to protect Central Asian economic and political interests and move Central Asian products to European and Asian markets. In the interests of regional stability, most of the Central Asian countries will support all measures designed to prevent a war against Iran. The Central Asian states are inclined to promote their own interests when dealing with each of the sides in the conflicting triangle (Russia, Iran, and the U.S.). Russia’s initiatives in the energy-transportation sphere are best suited to the local countries’ interests; however, alternative projects in which Iran can be involved, but in which Russia will have no role to play are not excluded.

It should be borne in mind that continued Iranian-American confrontation will produce direct and indirect, yet undesirable, consequences: regional interstate conflict potential, militarization of the Caspian, meager foreign investments, the slackening pace of economic integration, slower social-economic transformations, and greater instability in Central Asia.

POST-SOVIET ASIA: NEW GEOPOLITICAL TRENDS AND RUSSIA’S INTERESTS

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U ntil the late 1999, post-Soviet Central Asia as a whole, with the exception of Tajikistan, was seen as a stable region not prone to conflicts. There was still no talk of another round

of the Big Game that brought the leading world centers into the continent’s “heartland.” This talk began later, at the end of 2001. Today, we all know that the external stability of the 1990s was noth-

ing but a shell filled with vast destructive potential. So far, the Central Asian republics have not yet identified their geopolitical vectors—too many countries with special interests are present in the region.

This, together with the vast and varied raw material resources, has greatly increased the newly sovereign Central Asian countries' geopolitical and geo-economic weight.

In 2005-2006, "new Asia" attracted more attention from observers than the other post-Soviet

regions. The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, the Andijan events in Uzbekistan, and the presidential elections in Kazakhstan provided ample forecasting material. Today the Central Asian situation has become relatively stable, yet serious storms are still to come.

Russia's policy, although betraying new trends in this key region, remains vague. Today, however, Russia should acquire a new conception of its political and economic presence in Central Asia.

Post-Soviet Asia Demonstrates Contradictory Trends

The years of independence of the five newly sovereign Central Asian states can be described as a period when "time is out of joint." The power elites, the absolute majority of which took shape in 1960s-1980s as a product of the Communist Party, are completely engrossed in cementing their position, trading, more or less profitably, in what was left after the Soviet Union collapsed, and building up their image on an international scale.

Two countries—Uzbekistan (half of the post-Soviet Central Asian population, an authoritarian political system that kept society together) and Kazakhstan (rich mineral and raw material base and the most advanced market economy among its Central Asian neighbors with the conviction that this allows it to claim regional leadership)—were more active than the others.

The populations of the five republics experienced sharp social stratification, while freedom of the press, human rights and the rights of the national minorities were limited. In the last ten years, the domestic protest potential has been steadily mounting. In the absence of democratic reforms, the corruption-infested countries could neither offer enough jobs for their people, nor adequate health services to the generally ailing nations, nor high quality education. According to U.N. assessments, 70 to 80 percent of those residing in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan live below the poverty level. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (especially in the rural areas), the situation is not much better. Most of the population in Turkmenistan is also struggling to survive. This is a source of continuous replenishment for all sorts of extremist Islamist groups.

In 2000, Islamist radical sects appeared in Central Asia, they even found their way into Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the titular populations of which (nomads and pantheists until the early 20th century) have never been too biased toward the traditional and, even less so, toward the non-traditional Islamic trends.

Today, national security in the post-Soviet Asian republics remains low, a fact amply confirmed by the inroads of IMU fighters into the Kyrgyz-Uzbek-Tajik border areas: twice (in 1999 and 2000) about 200 to 300 fighters nearly defeated Kyrgyzstan and encountered no opposition on Tajik territory. In fact, only routing of the Taliban by the world community's united efforts saved the Central Asian regimes from a massive extremist attack planned for the fall of 2002.

The defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan weakened the Central Asian Islamist underground network, however the situation remained tense.

Recently certain negative trends have come to the fore in the Ferghana Valley, the meeting place of Kyrgyzstan (three regions of which are found there: Jalal-Abad, with a 0.9 million-strong popula-

tion; Osh, 1.2 million; and Batken, 0.4 million people); Uzbekistan (three regions: Namangan with 1.8 million people; Andijan, 2.2 million, and Ferghana, 1.2 million), and Tajikistan (the Sogd Region with 2.3 million residents).

There is the very real danger of destabilization in Kyrgyzstan; if this happens, tension on its border with Uzbekistan will increase, probably plunging the region into a wide-scale military-political conflict.

The armed Uzbek opposition, in turn, will build up its presence in southern Kyrgyzstan using the Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken regions, areas with a vast ethnic Uzbek population, as a toehold. The semi-legal structures of Hizb ut-Tahrir and some other extremist radical organizations are already operating there.¹

Recently, the regional Islamist structures operating in the south of Kyrgyzstan have been talking about an "Islamic autonomy" (made up of the Namangan, Andijan, and Ferghana regions of Uzbekistan and the Osh Region of Kyrgyzstan), which is understood as a territory "living according to the Shari'a laws," etc.²

In the summer of 2005, on the eve of presidential election in Kyrgyzstan, radical Islamists stepped up their activities in the republic; the National Security Council and the Ministry of the Interior had to conduct special operations. They neutralized two groups of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which were distributing leaflets, and liquidated the organization's secret print shop.

In May 2006, small units of IMU fighters (according to certain sources, they acted together with the fighting wing of Hizb ut-Tahrir) attacked the Tajik and Kyrgyz (the Batken Region) border guard outposts to test their combat readiness.

Recently, border skirmishes on Uzbekistan's borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have become more frequent—destabilization is being stirred up through a series of domestic and interstate conflicts.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is an obvious threat to Central Asian security, therefore we cannot help but be puzzled by the attempts of certain forces (particularly in Kyrgyzstan) in 2005-2006 to legalize the party for short-term political considerations. If realized this would have produced a negative effect and may have even cost the country its statehood. For obvious reasons Russia is closely following the regional developments.

The IMU scattered underground groups (since 2004, the organization has been called the Islamic Movement of Turkestan, IMT) are no less dangerous. After November 2001 when Juma Namangani, one of the leaders of the IMU's armed units, died, many of the well-known warlords, abetted and financed by al-Qa'eda functionaries, left the organization to set up armed groups of their own. The resultant ramified underground network became al-Qa'eda's additional resource in Central Asia.

Suicide bombers were first used in Central Asia in Tashkent and Bukhara in 2004. Before this, the region had had no taste of this phenomenon, a sure sign of al-Qa'eda's methods and tactics. In 2004, a series of terrorist acts in Uzbekistan carried out by the Jamaat al-Jihad was the first practical result of cooperation of the former IMU fighters and al-Qa'eda.

The scattered ("network") terrorist groups directly cooperating with the so-called world terrorist international, and operating on its money and according to its own instructions, have increased tension and made the antiterrorist struggle much harder to wage.

During the years of independence, the local elites have been demonstrating not only an inability to defend their countries' national security—they proved unable to close their own ranks: oligarchic groups and clans are drawn into an endless war for the right to inherit presidentship.

¹ See: S. Luzianin, "Prognoz dlia Kirgizii," *NG-Dipkur'er*, 25 April, 2005.

² D. Glumskov, "Besslavnyi konets epokhi: blizhayshe mesiatsy dlia Kirgizii stanut ochen' slozhnymi i politicheski, i ekonomicheski," *Ekspert-Kazakhstan*, 12 April, 2005.

The domestic problems are not the only stumbling block—there is no agreement among the Central Asian countries, which are moving from sharp comments and diplomatic notes to demonstrations of military might.

Loyalty and ethnic and spiritual kinship among them are superficial: relations are very complicated, inconsistent, and far removed from mutual understanding on a wide range of defense, economic and political issues: water and land use, delimitation and demarcation of state borders, disputable border territories and enclaves.

Tajik-Uzbek relations have never been as tense as they are today: over 60 citizens of Tajikistan perished in the Uzbek minefields along the border between the two countries; territorial disputes are no less complicated. Over half of the areas settled by ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks do not coincide with these states' borders and geographic locations, a source of never-ending ethnic and state contradictions.

There are between 70 and 100 disputable stretches of Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. The border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has about 70 disputable areas.

Turkmenistan is still involved in a dispute with Azerbaijan over certain oil and gas fields on the Caspian seabed. Saparmurat Niyazov, in his time, went as far as saying that the Caspian might “smack of blood.” It was only in the past twelve months, that Uzbek-Turkmenian tension was relieved somewhat and the two countries removed their troops from the border areas. In view of the continued mutual claims, this respite might turn out to be short-lived.

Exchanges of fire on the state borders in Central Asia are becoming more and more frequent. Armed clashes between border guards were first registered on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz and Tajik-Uzbek borders in 2006.

The water issue is another permanent factor of tension. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, two water monopolists, want Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to pay them for the use of their water resources. The problem is unlikely to be resolved: the Aral is rapidly disappearing, while the local rivers have been steadily losing water since 2006.

In recent years, the region acquired two inner centers of attraction—Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—involved in mutually exhausting rivalry over regional political leadership that is consistently undermining the weak regional integration impulses. On the whole, real consolidation and regional integration (under Kazakhstan's leadership) to which Kazakhstan is calling its neighbors are obviously far away. Neither Tashkent nor Ashgabad, which are paying lip service to the idea, feel tempted enough. Bishkek and Dushanbe have their own doubts.

Until recently, only “new Asia's” closest neighbors paid keen attention to what was going on in the region. Russia and Iran helped Tajikistan end its domestic strife with a settlement, while China reached certain agreements with Kazakhstan on localizing the separatist movements of the ethnic Uighurs, who in the first half of the 1990s tried to use Kazakhstan as a toehold of their struggle in Xinjiang. China even settled territorial disputes with Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan chose to settle the territorial and Uighur issues with China. Turkmenistan, the huge burden of its subjective problems notwithstanding, organized effective trade and economic relations with Iran, Russia, Ukraine, and other countries. Working together, Russia and China extended the Shanghai Five (SCO) membership to include all the post-Soviet Central Asian republics (with the exception of Turkmenistan). The organization was set up to implement certain major transport, economic, and trade projects and to develop a good-neighborly climate on the borders of the SCO members.

In an effort to balance out the mounting pressure of domestic and external factors, the Central Asian countries have been actively working on the best possible security and stability models. Today, their involvement in regional cooperation increased, but it has become neither more consistent nor more efficient. They have not yet selected the best security system for the region, in which there are several mutually excluding stability mechanisms.

The countries that have recently gained their sovereignty should clearly identify themselves on the international arena; they need foreign policy doctrines that will take into account their geopolitical and polyethnic specifics. Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev has correctly pointed out: "Central Asia is a potentially conflict region... Conflicts might develop in the region and around it. Some of them might flare up because of territories, water, and rich natural resources."³

By sitting on two or even three chairs (if we take into account China's weight and influence in the region), the ruling elites acquire tactical advantages and a lot of strategic headaches.

The still vague national interests of the Central Asian republics are forcing the political leaders to maneuver among several external forces, making their foreign policies less predictable with every turn.

Western Strategies

Until 2001, the United States, and the West in general, paid little attention to the Central Asian Soviet successor states; from time to time they issued statements on the region's rich energy potential and did next to nothing to support the few local dissidents. When pursuing economic and defense cooperation, Washington concentrated on (a) unilateral advantages and (b) minimizing spending.

Official Tashkent was the first to respond to the anti-Taliban measures undertaken by the United States and its allies. President Karimov allowed America to use his country's air space and permitted the U.S. to deploy its troops on Uzbek territory. The air base in Khanabad (Karshi) was used by air reconnaissance units with pilotless Predator aircrafts and radar surveillance units.

Kyrgyzstan followed suit: it allowed the coalition forces to use its military infrastructure. Tajikistan was the third to permit the counterterrorist coalition to use its airfields for military transportation aviation and military experts.

Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were the last two states to allow the coalition to use their air space. Astana sent a sapper platoon to Iraq, while Ashgabad is actively reviving the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan main pipeline project.

By the early 2005, Uzbekistan had the largest American contingent (over 2,000 privates and officers) in Central Asia deployed at the Khanabad airbase. In 2002-2003, Tashkent actively invited Washington to rent the airbase for 25 years.

Over 1,500 military were stationed in Kyrgyzstan at the Manas airport in Bishkek, which has the region's longest landing strip. The territory was considerably extended shortly before President Akaev lost his post.

From the very beginning the "honeymoon" between the United States and the autocratic regimes of "new Asia" was a contradictory one. The United States was quick to set up a significant military infrastructure in the region: air bases and "proto-centers," at which local military were trained by American (NATO) instructors. The Western special services obtained complete information about the region's airfield network and gathered exhaustive information about their new "Asian" allies. They still finance certain joint military programs and supply ammunition, medication, and special devices (communication, night vision and other high-tech military gadgets). The American and NATO bases of great potential geostrategic (so far regional) importance and the "proto-centers" have become a tool of American and Western geopolitical influence in Central Asia, forming a springboard from which the U.S. can bring pressure on the neighboring territories. In fact, the region can be easily controlled from these advantageously situated local airfields.

³ N. Nazarbaev, *Na poroge XXI veka*, Almaty, 1996, pp. 78-79.

At the same time, the U.S.'s newly acquired "third neighbor" status (not limited to geographic interpretation alone) triggered a new phase in "elite warfare." The series of Color Revolutions and the downfall of the Akaev regime in particular demonstrated that Washington would abandon the former communist secretaries-turned-presidents to their fate without any qualms in an effort to replace them with younger, and more pliable, pro-Western politicians.

The American money being poured into the newly independent Central Asian states is not enough for all the citizens of "new Asia" and cannot solve all its problems. We can hardly expect Washington to assume full financial responsibility for the vast territory and its 50 million-strong population plagued with a multitude of domestic and international ailments.

Kyrgyzstan is a good example: after realizing that the republic has become a vast field of new risks and unsolved problems, the West is energetically denying its involvement in the Kyrgyz events and has moved away. America's involvement—and the money it is prepared to spend in any given case—is limited. Today, Washington is not as enthusiastic as it used to be about the "Orange Revolution process." It obviously went wrong in Kyrgyzstan and was shelved until better times.

For a long time, the Uzbek leaders were sure that economic and military-strategic cooperation with the United States would pay for their country's numerous economic problems. By the end of 2002, however, Tashkent had grown tired of its excessive dependence on the United States in many spheres caused by America's military presence in the country.

The Western state and human rights organizations unleashed a wide-scale information war against Uzbekistan in the wake of the Andijan events. Tashkent retaliated by expelling the American base from the republic's territory, siding with Russia and China, and joining the EurAsEC and the CSTO.

After losing its position in Uzbekistan, the United States hastily moved toward new strategies in Central Asia.

Today, Washington is tempting Astana with the role of "strategic regional partner." There is the opinion that "America decided to place its stakes on Kazakhstan not only in the economic, but also in the military sphere."⁴ This is a logical step: having lost Tashkent, Washington was left with no choice. Out of the five local countries, only Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are eligible for the role of regional leaders. There is another consideration: Astana's highly pragmatic policy in the Caspian is making it possible for the American transnational companies to invest in oil production and derive huge profits.

The current lull in America's advance in Central Asia can dupe no one: after launching several alternatives of regime change on the post-Soviet expanse (the so-called velvet revolutions) in late 2003, the West built up its pressure on the former Soviet republics and intensified the power struggle in them. Despite the talks about "strategic partnership" and the promises of "dollar showers," the United States remains resolved to change the political leaders on the post-Soviet expanse.

On the whole, the U.S. and NATO intend to strengthen their long-term military-strategic presence in Central Asia. However, this is a fairly complicated process involving numerous factors, primarily Russian, Chinese, and Iranian. In view of this, the United States might either carry out all sorts of "democratic transformations" in the authoritarian Central Asian republics or use them as a threat.

There is every reason to believe that Washington has learned the Iranian lesson: back in 1979, it took the Islamic revolution in Iran a couple of months to wipe out the fruits of a decade of persistent work with the Shah regime, which looked pro-Western enough even though it was burdened with clan and family corruption and the appalling poverty of over 80 percent of the Iranian population. The post-Soviet Asian expanse brings pre-revolutionary Iran to mind.

⁴ P. Sviatenkov, "Kazakhstan sdelauiut liderom," *APN-Kazakhstan*, 7 November, 2005.

The Chinese Factor

Recently China entered the new Asia field as one of the central players together with the RF and the U.S. The radical geopolitical changes in the region forced Beijing to radically revise its relations with the Central Asian newly independent states.

This strategy was suggested by the local countries' cautious attitude toward China's military, economic, and demographic might. The local Sino-phobia obvious at the grass-roots and elite levels should not be forgotten either.

The oil of Kazakhstan's Caspian sector served as one of the key attractions that pulled China into the Big Central Asian Game. In order to continue, China's unprecedented economic growth needs more energy fuels. According to certain forecasts, in 2010, the Asian Pacific countries will import up to 1.5 billion tons of oil alone, with China's share reaching 200 million tons.⁵ Meanwhile, domestic oil production in China is dwindling.

Under the pressure of mounting energy consumption, Beijing decided on a wide-scale strategy of gaining access to Central Asian oil and gas fields. Today it is busy realizing it. Russia, the United States, and some other countries have already recognized China as their rival in the struggle for Central Asia's fuel resources.

It should be borne in mind that the economic ties between China and Kazakhstan cannot be described as "silent expansion." Some Kazakh experts and politicians are concerned about the flow of Chinese goods into the country—yet this happens elsewhere in the world. As early as 2004, China became the world's trade leader with the trade turnover of \$1 trillion. Central Asia is not a link detached from the chain that connects China with the rest of the world.

So far, the relations between the Central Asian republics and China, as well as the potential radicalization of Beijing's position on certain Central Asian issues, are still affected by the continued Western (American to be more exact) military presence in the region, which potentially may bring pressure on the neighboring territories, China's western provinces in particular.

In the altered geopolitical situation, Beijing deemed it necessary to complement its economic cooperation with the Central Asian new independent countries with cooperation in the defense sphere. So far it is acting selectively: its policies vary from one post-Soviet state to the next; the defense partnership still coming second to China's economic influence in the region.

Being very much concerned with America's presence in Central Asia, which is seen from Beijing as a sphere of its immediate national interests, it is accelerating the process of turning the SCO (which in 2001 developed from the Shanghai Five) into a regional counterbalance of sorts to the "extra-regional forces."

Recently China has been making a clearer show of its interest in local raw materials and the local markets, as well as making a claim to political and economic leadership, through the SCO structures in particular.

Russia is drawing closer to China because its relations with the United States and the West deteriorated when it came to defining the spheres of influence on the post-Soviet expanse. The Russian Federation is not yet strong enough to oppose pressure single-handedly; it has to look for, and find, common interests with China. Indeed, the two countries are resolved to keep America's growing influence in Central Asia in check with the help of the SCO.

Recently, the Chinese factor became Moscow's utilitarian tool used to bring pressure on the EU states that keep Gazprom away from the European gas distribution networks. It is precisely for this reason that Russia is actively discussing, at different levels, the possibility and carrying out

⁵ See: O. Sidorov, "Neftianye interesy Kitaia v Tsentral'noy Azii," *Gazeta.kz*, 16 October, 2003.

feasibility studies of investments in a vast gas infrastructure with the intention of increasing fuel export to China.

The 2005 Astana SCO summit demonstrated that the SCO members perceive America's rising involvement in the region as a cause of concern prompted not only by the U.S. military presence, but also by its efforts to "democratically transform" the local political regimes.

The SCO members do not agree with America's approaches to the Central Asian region. Partly because of its ideological obsession, partly because of its deep conviction that democracy can cure all social and geopolitical ills, Washington is resolved to "spread democracy" in Central Asia. Any impartial observer can see that any attempt at prompt democratization will bring chaos and make the local republics "failed states."

Moscow and Beijing are exhibiting much less democratic messianism, but they know the region much better. In it, democratization should come after economic and social modernization, otherwise it would never strike root and would remain counterproductive; democracy is part of modernization, not its vehicle.

Both China and Russia prefer to preserve the Central Asian regimes in the short-term and, if the worst comes to worst, long-term perspective; they prefer regional stability and the semblance of peace among the local elites and nations.

So far the SCO is orientated toward "counteracting terrorism and creating an efficient mechanism needed to cope with the task."⁶ There are signs, however, that with the active involvement of Beijing and Moscow, the SCO may, in the near future, develop into a powerful regulatory and attractive regional factor.

The 2004 Tashkent summit was marked not only by the statements of the heads of member states to the effect that the SCO permanent structures (the Secretariat in Beijing and the Headquarters of the Regional Antiterrorist Structure in Tashkent) would start functioning to their greatest capacities, but also by the PRC's much more active position. China is the SCO's main donor; it also offered trade credits to its SCO partners for a total of \$900 million.⁷ The offer was repeated at the Astana summit.

The SCO organizers want to see it one of the poles of the gradually emerging multipolar world; in the future, the SCO may develop into a link of the future "arc of stability," as opposed to the "arc of instability" that stretches from Western Europe to Southeast Asia.

The above should not be taken to mean that the SCO has exclusive advantages over the other regional security mechanisms. It looks as if the Central Asian republics have no specific and well-substantiated strategies—both in relation to the SCO and to the other regional military-political projects. We can agree with Kazakhstan expert Erlan Karin, who says that the Asian newly independent states are guiding by their short-term rather than long-term interests.⁸

Russia's Interests

During the time that has elapsed since the Soviet Union's disintegration, Moscow failed to elaborate an integral Central Asian policy. There were no more or less clear principles of what to do in the region and how. There was no clear position in relation to the Russian and Russian-speaking diasporas in the Central Asian republics. Nothing was done to work in any consistent way with the local

⁶ K. Kosachev, "ShOS kak al'ternativa amerikanskomu vliianiu v Tsentral'noy Aziii," *NG-Dipkur'er*, 29 September, 2003.

⁷ See: T. Stanovaia, "Iz ShOS v ODKB pereletaia," *Politkom Ru*, 21 June, 2004.

⁸ See: E. Karin, "ShOS i ee znachenie dlia Tsentral'noy Azii. Gosudarstva TsA posle 11 sentiabria," *Assandi Times*, 25 June, 2004.

elites. In 1991-1996, the Russian political leaders wanted nothing but to “uncouple the Asian car.” This, and the unlimited Euro-Atlantic orientation, crippled Russia’s interests—the region was gradually pulled into the spheres of interest of third countries.⁹

In recent years, the situation has been gradually improving: slowly but surely the Russian Federation is acquiring its Central Asian tactics and a basic strategy. The foreign policy bloc of Russian politics has changed to a certain extent: Moscow treated the power change in Bishkek very effectively;¹⁰ it offered a very balanced assessment of the Andijan riot; it is successfully promoting Russian’s energy interests in Central Asia (this is especially true of the recent Russian-Turkmenian-Kazakh agreements on the Caspian pipeline) and some of the Kremlin’s other steps. From this we can conclude that Russia is seeking a more active position in its dialog with the CIS regimes, which some experts regard as “candidates for regime change.” By the 21st century, its sphere of influence in Central Asia had shrunk; Moscow, however, is not discouraged, it is working hard to preserve and even expand what is left of its regional position. In 2003 and 2004, it achieved a great deal, but its policy is still impulsive—Russia responds to local developments. We get the impression that Moscow is merely trying to keep up with the United States.

Central Asia’s rich natural resources are landlocked; the region’s limited access to the world markets and undeveloped communication networks make it dependent on Russia. The years of independence have not brought about many changes: the Russian Federation is the chief trade partner and transit territory for energy fuels and other raw materials, as well as the main supplier of fighting equipment and weapons.

Foreign military presence is not Russia’s only concern; the prospect of a very expensive and prolonged struggle over the region’s natural and industrial resources is another. The territories of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan hold 4.3 percent of the proven gas reserves (about 8 trillion c m).

The Americans’ unwillingness to reveal their long-term plans is adding to Russia’s worries.

The Kremlin has already outlined its political targets in post-Soviet Central Asia: it will develop its own oil industry and increase its export of energy resources. The Russian president has already warned Washington that he will not shun steps going beyond the limits of his country’s cooperation with the United States.

America’s military presence undermines Russia’s, China’s, and Iran’s influence on the regional economies and policies. Today, the Russian Federation is cooperating with the U.S. and, on the whole, shares its antiterrorist aims. As the war in Afghanistan is developing into a slack, “chronic” process, America’s continued military presence in the region annoys Russia, China, Iran, and India—the Eurasian leaders with direct interests in the region.

Central Asia is a strategic buffer that keeps external threats away. For this reason, Russia has to keep Central Asia in the sphere of its interests. This explains its negative feelings about the foreign military presence there.

Russia’s Central Asian policy hinges on its economic interests, which calls for continued control over those countries that Russia finds to be very important. Kazakhstan is one of them, its economic and political importance cannot be overrated: Soviet military and industrial facilities, including Baikonur, are still on its territory.

Russia maintains wide economic and political contacts with Kazakhstan; it renewed the lease on Baikonur for the next 50 years.¹¹ There is an agreement on exporting Kazakh gas to Europe through the Gazprom transportation network.

⁹ See: V. Khliupin, “Tsentral’naia Azia: kogda bessil’na vostochnaia mudrost’,” *Rosbalt*, 6 April, 2005.

¹⁰ See: M. Walker, “Problema ‘Bol’shoy Karty.’ Izdaleka i svysoka sobytia vidiatsia po-drugomu,” *United Press International*, 29 March, 2005, available at [<http://www.inosmi.ru/print/218443.html>].

¹¹ See: R. Streshnev, “Na novyi uroven’ integratsii,” *Krasnaia zvezda*, 21 April, 2004.

Kazakhstan comes 13th (11th by Astana's official figures) in the world as far as oil reserves are concerned and is the second, after Russia, oil producer on former Soviet territory. It accounts for about 60 million tons of oil production and is resolved to reach the figure of 100 million by 2010-2012 and 150 million by 2015. Control over energy resources and transportation means is easily translated into strategy and economic tools.

One of the key pipelines, Central Asia-Center, which brings Uzbek and Turkmenian gas to the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and the Southern Caucasus, runs across Kazakhstan.

Uzbekistan is another important Central Asian state. Moscow has wrung dry the advantages supplied by the withdrawal of America's support of President Karimov because of the human rights violations by his government. Russia formalized its economic and military agreements with the republic, which strengthened its position in the Republic of Uzbekistan and in the region as a whole. Under this agreement, the countries will work together on a wide-scale security system that will involve their defense ministries, the ministries of foreign affairs and the interior, and the security councils to oppose terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, drug trafficking, and organized crime.

By reviving, after a six-year interval, its CSTO membership, Uzbekistan radically changed the geopolitical game in the region. Today, four out of the five states (with the exception of Turkmenistan) are in the CSTO's influence zone, which gives Moscow a much better chance of gaining more weight in the region.

Gazprom is producing gas on the Shakhpakhty gas field¹² and is prepared to invest up to \$1,500,000 million in the Ustiurt gas fields in Uzbekistan. The Russian company has already bought up almost the entire transportation capacity of the region up to the year 2010: for at least three years Moscow will remain the monopoly buyer of Central Asian gas.

It should be said that hydrocarbon reserves (gas in particular) are not Uzbekistan's only trump card: Russia's light industry largely depends on Uzbek cotton; the country is the world's ninth gold producer and is in the first ranks of uranium producers. There is the opinion that today the republic is the world's third largest uranium exporter and the fifth largest uranium producer with the seventh largest uranium deposits in the world.¹³

On the whole, there are a great many economic ties between Russia and Central Asia.

Russia's vital interests in the Central Asian raw material complex can be described by the words: hydrocarbons, uranium, steel, gold, rare earth metals, aluminum, cotton, etc. This means that Moscow should always keep its economic interests in mind in a region rich in natural resources and, at the same time, should tread with caution so as not to be accused of neo-imperialism.

Proper defense services do not come cheap. Russia's effective policy should be placed on the firm basis of a wide economic presence and large-scale and mutually advantageous economic projects. Genuine alliance relations require an economic basis—Moscow should take part in mining, it should have a share in the region's railways and highways, power lines, power generating facilities, and pipelines.

Moscow should build up its influence in the region and attract the local elites by investing in oil and gas prospecting and extraction; large loans; modernization of transport infrastructure, promotion of the Russian companies, and setting up JVs for the production and transportation of oil and gas.

Central Asia is strategically important for Russia's control over oil and gas production and their transportation to the Near Abroad. To avoid economic isolation Russia should build new pipelines in

¹² See: K. Aiapova, "Kranovaia diplomatiia," *Delovia nedelia, Kazakhstan*, 11 February, 2005.

¹³ See: D. Kholmatorov, "'Medvezhia usluga': SShA ne puskalet evropeytssev k uzbekskomu uranu," *Transkaspiyskiy proekt*, 19 June, 2001.

Central Asia. Russian oil and gas companies have stepped up their involvement in Kazakhstan, an arena on which the world centers of power clashed over oil exports. This is true of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as well.

A close alliance with Turkmenistan, still at the post-Niyazov crossroads, is vitally important for Russia. The European Union has already offered to pay Turkmenistan 1.7 million Euro for feasibility studies of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline project (TCP) to move gas to Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Earlier, shortly before President Niyazov's death, China (which by 2010 will import up to 80 billion c m of gas)¹⁴ made Turkmenistan the offer of laying a pipeline across Central Asia with the future involvement of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Whether Ashgabad can fulfill its export obligations remains to be seen. So far, it remains an unpredictable state; no one knows whether its "old-new" leaders will stick to their obligations relating to new pipelines and gas deliveries.

The new president, G. Berdymukhammedov, hints that he is interested in the TCP project, which requires a trans-Caspian pipeline with an annual carrying capacity of 30 billion c m.¹⁵ On the opposite Caspian coast it will join the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline and continue on to Europe through the Nabucco pipeline. For several years running, Europe and America lobbied a project that recently ran into a dead end. The EU shelved it until the spring of 2008. If implemented the project will bring Turkmenian gas to Europe bypassing Russia; it will become Gazprom's rival. It looks as if Moscow is prepared to go far in its opposition to the TCP and will not limit itself when choosing means and methods.

Russia has to implement a large set of measures to preserve its role of an energy superpower and to step up its influence in Central Asia. In May 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited several Central Asian states to avert the TCP danger and to create a single energy system with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, a sort of an energy alliance in which Russia could control fuel exports to the world markets. By the same token, the Kremlin initiative will supply the Central Asian countries with wider access to the foreign markets and increase their export revenue.

The Russian Federation has entered into a long and exhaustive battle for its continued monopoly on the transportation of Central Asian fuels; it has already scored success: it was decided that an agreement should be drawn up by 1 September on building a Caspian gas pipeline with a capacity of 30 billion c m, construction is planned for the latter half of 2008. In addition, the Russian Federation undertook modernization and extension of the Central Asia-Center system (the agreement was signed by Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

In recent years the outlines of Russia's involvement in Central Asia has been changing: Moscow is seeking a stronger position by extending its involvement beyond the energy and transport-communication sphere to defense. It has already signed several bilateral and multilateral agreements with the region's countries.

Together with Russia's economic and military contacts, the Collective Security Treaty, transformed into the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), serves as another tool of Russia's influence; in fact it makes the Russian Federation the key "player" in this structure. Russia is also strengthening its position with the SCO.

To cement its regional position Russia should rely on the fundamental principles: its obvious territorial superiority should not remain the linchpin of Russia's strategy. Russia should continue with strengthening stability as one of the foreign policy cornerstones, which makes the economic and military tools most efficient.

¹⁴ See: N. Ziiadullaev, "Tsentral'naia Azia: konkurentstva i partnerstvo," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 July, 2007.

¹⁵ See: A. Matveev, "V tsentre geopolitiki superderzhav. Ekonomicheskaiia aktivnost' na Kaspii dopolniaetsia voennoy," *Voенno-promyshlennyi kur'er*, 20-26 June, 2007.

In the future, America's continued presence in the region and its influence will threaten Russia's interests. If the Central Asian states reorient themselves toward serving the West's interests, Russia's military, economic, and energy ties with post-Soviet Asia, which are critically important for Russia's national security, will suffer.

China's attempts to establish control over Asia are no less detrimental: Beijing's constantly mounting economic might and its military and economic influence may undermine Russia's interests in the mid-term perspective.

In view of the above, Moscow's new strategy in Central Asia calls for the harmonized interests of Russia and China, the two main "natural" guarantors of Central Asian stability; this process is successfully developing within the SCO and within bilateral cooperation.

It was suggested that a regional Energy Club (united energy expanse) should be set up within the SCO as an element of a global energy policy that would unite energy producer and energy consumer countries.

So far it seems that most of the local elites are much more attracted by Russia's determination to preserve stability rather than by accelerated democratization enforced from the outside. The absolute majority of the regional leaders prefer gradual economic and sociopolitical transformations—they are rejecting attempts to impose Western models. For this reason, Russia has acquired a "window of opportunity" that will not be closed at least in the short term. If used rationally, it can be used to preserve and even increase Russia's influence in Central Asia.

GEORGIA IN RUSSIAN POLICY

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For a long time now, the Russian and Georgian political elites have been engaged in information warfare. It has even been seen to occur in cycles and produce noxious emissions at regular intervals, which poison the relations between the two countries.

Today, the relations between the two sovereign states, which not so long ago belonged to the same country, are described using Cold War terms.

I have not posed myself the task of going back to the history of Russian-Georgian relations:

this would have called for a detailed analysis of the domestic reforms of the post-Soviet societies and the factors responsible for different vectors of their foreign policies.

Mine is a more modest task: I have undertaken to identify the political myths still current in Georgian-Russian relations as well as the reasons for their viability.

They come to the fore during periods when relations between the two countries worsen and mutual alienation and rejections take on radical tones.

When the Sides Started Drifting Apart

In search of the possible causes of mutual alienation, let us take a look into the past.

We all know that one of the parts of the bipolar world disintegrated amid the failed perestroika reforms, because the “fathers of perestroika” did not realize that the convergence of two opposite systems and their coexistence within the “new thinking” of the communist and liberal ideologies were impossible. Under the global onslaught of liberalism, dogmatic Marxism had to retreat. The destruction of a system that could not respond to the challenges of the scientific and technological revolution raised an anti-wave that brought not only liberal-democratic ideas. The political elites of the young post-Soviet states were a weird symbiosis of Communist Party bureaucracy and nationalists. Radicalism, anti-Sovietism, and anti-communism served as the soil on which the ideologies of national self-identification flourished.

The states, particularly the young states, which had no “state-bureaucracy” or “state-nation” experience to rely on, had to start from scratch.

Their developing national ideologies had to move against the anti-wave and oppose not only the dying dogmatic Marxism, but also the globalistic highly ambitious ideologies. This caused the ethnic conflicts and civil war at the first stage of Georgia’s independence. It was then that Georgia’s political consciousness, patronizing in its nature, developed its main attitude—alienation from the patron of the latest two centuries of cultural and political experience. The events of 9 April, 1989 played an important role in the nation’s rejection of the old patron and started the process of the mythologization of the heroes who sacrificed themselves to the sociopolitical idea. They played an important role in mobilizing public opinion and in creating the halo of a charismatic leader. The nationalist-minded part of Georgia’s political elite (the Zviadists, followers of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of Georgia) developed the idea of “democratic Russia” as an heir to “imperial Russia.” Democratic Russia supported the “aggressive separatism” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which had split off from Georgia, while the latter was presented as a victim of confrontation between the Kremlin and the West.

Another group of Georgian experts believes that “aggressive separatism” and the Yeltsin regime that abetted it were the main reasons for the disagreements between Georgia and Russia. They argued that “the old patron” was merely punishing the “prodigal son who rejected his father.” There is also the opinion that in Abkhazia Russia was fighting Georgia in order to meddle with its independent development.

One thing is clear: the interstate contradictions are rooted in the early years of the states’ independence. It was at that time that the absent national ideology was replaced by political myths; the objective post-Soviet contradictions were aggravated by subjective reasons that bred mistrust and animosity. The post-Soviet leaders were acting on the momentum of the past; in the absence of new strategies or methodologies they had no choice but to lean on the Soviet mentality and totalitarian traditions. Mutual understanding was obviously lacking, even though the principles of international partnership received a lot of superficial support.¹

Georgia acquired a hybrid government system that smacked of an authoritarian bias. Democratic institutions and values are still developing, but democracy is fairly contradictory. Some of the analysts describe it as “virtual democracy,” a product of the huge PR project of the Color Revolutions. Our researchers point out that democracy in Georgia is of a functional nature conditioned by political purposefulness; it serves the idea of restored territorial integrity. This is what the national project is

¹ See: A. Neklessa, “Ordo quardo: chetvertyi poriadok: prishestvie postsovetskogo mira,” *Polis*, No. 6, 2000.

about. In the absence of a national idea, it is promoting PR projects using external resources and plays on the contradictions among the main actors engaged in another redivision of the spheres of influence in the Caucasus.

S. Lounev, who specialized in international affairs and writes extensively on Russia's policy in the Southern Caucasus, has identified several stages and pointed to their typical features. He is convinced that in the early 1990s, Russia had no clear strategy, there were merely "random responses to local developments rather than forecasting them, and voluntarism." On the whole, the Russian author describes Moscow's policy in the Southern Caucasus in the last decade as a complete failure: "The Russian Federation had no clear and balanced conception about its relations with the former Soviet republics. It was generally believed that they should either be forced back, that they were nothing more than a 'civilizational burden,' or that they should be left to their own devices for some time until they realized there was no alternative to a new alliance with Russia."

His conclusion is highly significant: "In this way Russia itself created unfriendly neighbors in the south," and "the situation began to gradually improve when Vladimir Putin came to power... Russia ... started acting more pragmatically," however, he added, there is no clear ideas about the future of the post-Soviet expanse in general and the Southern Caucasus in particular.²

His ideas are shared, to a certain extent, by Russia's academic community, which proceeds from an analysis of the relations between Moscow and Tbilisi to arrive at fairly radical conclusions. He insists that Russia should abandon Georgia as a lost country: there is no strong pro-Russian political force in Georgia. It will inevitably join NATO, since the absolute majority of the local people want this.³

These radical conclusions appeared in September-December 2006, at a time when the relations between the two countries were at their lowest. Here I shall discuss these ideas, as well as the interpretation of the events in Georgia and Russia.

Before going on, I would like to come back to the arguments offered above, which concluded with: "By withdrawing from Georgia, Russia will not lose much economically, the sub-region is of no particular interest to the RF." Some radically minded politicians go as far as suggesting that Russia should abandon the "formal principle" of Georgia's territorial integrity. They brandish the "strategic weapon" of Kosovo, which can be used in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. According to Director of the CIS Institute Konstantin Zatulín, this will make Russia's policy more open. Georgia's future NATO membership that "will make it Russia's enemy or rival will create numerous problems that are better avoided."⁴

There is another group that prefers the status quo: Russia should recognize the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity and insist on preserving the "frozen conflicts," which is especially advisable in view of the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games. The members of this group support the idea of a "liberal empire," more active "economic intervention," and the efforts of preventing Georgia's NATO membership. They postulate the tactics of "relieving or increasing the sanctions against the recalcitrant neighbor depending on the situation."⁵

The politicians of both countries cannot ignore Georgia's domestic problems; there is another stumbling block: the Georgian leaders' efforts to resolve the "protracted conflicts" in a revolutionary way. The country's foreign policy orientation toward integration with NATO and the European Un-

² S. Lounev, «Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus: Geopolitical Value for Russia,» *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (39), 2006, pp. 22-23.

³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 26 (see also: A. Fomenko, "Na kholmakh Gruzii — nochnaia mgla," *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 45, 2006).

⁴ K. Zatulín, "Pravo, v kotorom otkazali," *Materik, Institut SNG*, Bulletin No. 172, 15 July, 2007.

⁵ M. Grigoriev, "Politika umirovorenia M. Saakashvili vediot k bystromu vytesneniu Rossii," *Akademia trinitarizma*, Moscow, El No. 77, publication 13855, 5 October, 2006.

ion are closely associated with these intentions. Restored territorial integrity and the spread of Georgian sovereignty across its entire territory are two priorities, which makes NATO membership doubly important: this is a tool for guaranteed restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity and of democratic development and a final divorce with the Eurasian civilization. These messages have found their way into the ideological and PR set of ideas of the "color revolutionaries," who in 2004 and 2005 were talking about a "sanitary cordon around the reviving Russian 'liberal empire'."

It is in this context that the Georgian political elite is putting forward the conception of regional security in GUAM, TRACECA, and the Silk Roads system; the East-West transit energy routes and Georgia's return to the "European Home" as the "oldest European country." This is the dominant conception that serves as the cornerstone of Georgia's future independence on the global scale. Its desire to join the European Union and NATO is another manifestation of Georgia's devotion to democracy and freedom. There is a latent agreement that the old patron is not a paragon of democracy, therefore, Georgia and its relations with Russia will profit from the former's NATO and EU membership.⁶

The Myths about the Split

In fact, it is in this sphere that the fields of tension, Cold War waves, and political myths appear to push the two countries apart.

These myths are applied to the charismatic leaders of the two states and give rise to various images, such as a "fair," "bold," and "heroic" bearer of the national ideas, "gatherer of the lands," or, on the other hand, a "perfidious enemy," "destroyer of order," or "pragmatic imperialist."

The formulas may change depending on the state of relations between the countries.

We all know that after the Rose Revolution, the President of Georgia was seen in Russia as a young and effective reformer, who offered friendship to the Russian leaders. Mikhail Saakashvili was greatly impressed by the Russian president when they met in February 2004. He was impressed by the modesty and flexibility of the Kremlin master. There was the impression that the two countries had entered a new stage of their bilateral, this time positive, relations.

In Russia, Vladimir Putin is seen as a strong and fair ruler who is restoring Russia's "autocracy" and grandeur. V. Degoev has written the following on that score: "V. Putin precisely fits Russia, its present state, problems and potential, fears and hopes. He is a leader whom the people trust, who is, on the whole, predictable and yet enigmatic."⁷

Mikhail Saakashvili himself is an inordinately active and energetic leader; he is more open, he is a populist inclined to theatricals. PR-shows have become an inalienable part of Georgia's political theater. As often happens, his merits are his demerits. In our case, it is not what the academic community thinks of the Georgian president and what he is doing—we are interested in what the public and the political class of Russia think of him.⁸ After meeting Putin for the first time, the young Georgian president announced that he would learn from him how to govern the state.

The media even started calling him the "Georgian Putin."

The peaceful Rose Revolution that brought Saakashvili to power created the illusion that in Abkhazia and South Ossetia too, the road toward peaceful conflict settlement would be an easy one,

⁶ Cf. N. Silaev, "GUAM and the Smaller Game in the Post-Soviet Expanse," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (40), 2006.

⁷ V. Degoev, "Eshcho raz o zagadke Putina," *Politicheskiy klass*, No. 1, 2007, pp. 28-29.

⁸ See: Art. Khachaturian, "Uspekhi M. Saakashvili. Politicheskiy portret," *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 37, 2006; V. Tret'akov, "Politicheskiy dnevnik," *Politicheskiy klass*, No. 10, 2006.

even though the conflicts there were described as highly complicated and protracted social conflicts. The “revolutionary attack” on Tskhinvali in the summer of 2004 blew away the myth of “revolutionary leader.” While accelerating the “chariot of the revolution” in the post-Soviet expanse, Mikhail Saakashvili stirred into action those who wanted to preserve the power of the “fathers of perestroika.” There were others who rejected the revolutionary methods. By that time, Russia had lived through an oligarchic “liberal-revolutionary wave” and started “gathering” the state and developing its sovereign democracy. The Russian politicians are working hard to restore the image of a state capable of embracing democracy and to revive its functions as a “union-forming” country.

The stages of post-Soviet development in both countries do not coincide. The Russian Federation set about strengthening its position on the ruins of the Soviet Union without a strategy or a conception (the quasi-conception of a “liberal empire” that described geo-economics as the foundation for developing the environment cannot be taken seriously). This explains why the “idealism” of Boris Yeltsin’s time was replaced with Vladimir Putin’s tough pragmatism. He failed to find common points with the PR methodology of the Color Revolutions and with the ideals of the revolutionary leaders resolved to restore Georgia’s territorial integrity by playing on the contradictions between the U.S. and the EU, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other.

Stronger sovereignty through Color Revolutions means rotation on the political Olympus, which destroys the old order and starts another round of squabbles over the spheres of influence in the Caucasus. At first, the newly elected president tried to accomplish this without Russia, then he brought in NATO, the EU, and other international organizations, which changed the format of the conflict settlement. Seen from Russia, which is caught between development stages (the “liberal-democratic” period has been left behind, while a new period has not yet been reached), such revolutionary measures looked misplaced and, worse, plain dangerous.

In Russia, he was seen less as a revolutionary who changed ideas than as a destroyer of order; at home the Georgian president acquired the image of “hero-builder.” His activities, however, cannot be described in unambiguous terms: he is a reformer, a builder of new Georgia, and a fighter against corruption, but he is moving away from democratic principles. Violence predominates in everything he does; his actions are less pragmatic, tend to be highly emotional, and are often incompetent. His excessive ambitions ignite him with a desire to become the leader in the post-Soviet expanse; he ignored the CIS standards and earned the fame of the “hero-destroyer.” At first the Russian political technologists spoke of him in positive terms. Gleb Pavlovskiy said that he was “not anti-Russian,” that he was “resolved to find a new way of restoring statehood and the economy on foreign money, after creating a manageable crisis” and that “bluffing was his style as a flexible and skilled improvisator” whose aim was “to create the illusion of a conflict between Russia and Georgia.”⁹

Later the attitude toward the political “actor” began to change: the Russian political elite was displeased with the problems he created in the “far south.” The impulsive and energetic Georgian president who, according to Kremlin political technologists Sergey Markov, Alexander Dugin and Gleb Pavlovskiy, was building up a “sanitary cordon” around Russia, caused nothing but negative feelings.

This gave rise to a myth that described the Georgian president as Moscow’s arch-enemy who followed in the footsteps of NATO and the West, which were moving into the post-Soviet expanse. It was not a random coincidence that President Saakashvili’s plummeting rating in Russia coincided with the great powers’ confrontation over the East-West energy projects and the desire of the Georgian leaders to make their country the main transit-country.

⁹ G. Pavlovskiy, “Saakashvili budet iskat’ i nakhodit’ vsio novye povody vyiti na obostrenie otnosheniy s Rossiey,” available at [www.sakartvelo.info], 17 August, 2004.

In the context of the Russia-the West opposition, Mikhail Saakashvili has acquired an “ominous image;” it was commonly believed that he would plant Western ideas in every post-Soviet corner. In September 2006, the Georgian authorities went to the extreme when trying to speed up the withdrawal of the Russian military bases from Georgia: they detained several Russian servicemen. This was the last straw: Russia’s patience was exhausted by what the “Georgian revolutionaries” were doing to settle their domestic problems and the disagreements with Russia. The Russian ambassador to Georgia was recalled; diplomatic relations were reduced to the minimum, and economic and other sanctions were introduced against the Georgian state.

“What does Saakashvili have to do with it?” asked the author of an article in *Kavkazskiy kur’er* that appeared on 8 November, 2006. The West and Russia were locked in a struggle over the Caucasus, or rather over spheres of influence in the region. Washington announced that it was disenchanted with Moscow.

In his article that appeared in *Nezavisimaia gazeta* on 5 October, 2006 entitled “Moskva-Tbilisi: blokada po vsem frontam” (Moscow-Tbilisi: Blockade Along all Fronts), Yu. Petrovskaja said that Georgia was pursuing an anti-Russian policy and had played its anti-Russian card to speed up its NATO membership. The author quoted Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as saying in Strasbourg that Georgia did not meet the NATO criteria, which meant that its anti-Russian policy was being used as a claim to special treatment.

The idea the Georgia is still not ready to join the Alliance because of its undeveloped democracy, violations of human rights and the rights of national minorities, and the inability of the country’s leaders to deal with the conflicts has become an ideological weapon and a source of myths and brainwashing. Today, part of the Russian political elite is industriously tending to the myth about a republic with scanty natural resources that lost the chance of pursuing an independent policy and finding an identity of its own in global democracy. The myths about Georgia’s economic miracle, investment boom, the Georgian nation’s exclusiveness, and the noteworthy political tolerance demonstrated by the “revolutionary leaders of the oldest European country” are being dethroned. Some Russian political scientists, Konstantin Zatulin in particular, who relies on sociological polls which reveal the President of Georgia is losing popularity with his nation, are looking forward to a “Georgian de Gaulle” friendly toward the Kremlin.

The mythology of leaders has created a string of “heroes of our time” who perfectly fit the logic of a “manageable ruler.” Is it an echo of the “Big Brother” conception still popular in certain political circles? This highly consumerist idea is still fashionable in both capitals: it is more than a product of the totalitarian past—it was born by the crisis of the liberal-democratic ideology in the post-Soviet expanse.

Very much in the Cold War style, Mikhail Saakashvili was branded as a Russophobe and incompetent leader.

The analysts of the Russian weekly *Ekspert* offered a set of recommendations on how to oppose the anti-Russian policy of the Georgian president. It runs a section eloquently called “Gruzia protiv Rossii” (Georgia vs. Russia), which has detected in everything what “non-technological and unmanageable” Mikhail Saakashvili tries to do: he wants to wring dry the conflict with Russia by provoking it into aggressive actions to demonstrate to Georgia’s trans-Atlantic patron that “small democratic Georgia was the victim of the Russian monster.”

V. Ionov, a political analyst, has written: “The main audience of Georgian demarches is found in the United States,” while Saakashvili plays the card of the pagan “us and them” dichotomy. Mikhail Saakashvili has acquired the habit of turning to Europe for help: “What is going on in Russia is much more than a banal crisis in our bilateral relations. We have to deal with people who are recklessly playing the ethnic nationalist card. This is very dangerous, particularly for Russia. This is related to Europe and all of us.” According to the Russian author, Mikhail Saakashvili is trying to humiliate Russia and

damage its image as a democratic country by opposing it to Europe of which Georgia is part. When talking about the “asymmetric answer of Russia to Georgian provocations,” the author is obviously doubtful that “Saakashvili will profit from this. He will gain nothing. Russia, in turn, by reviving the already forgotten arguments has lost a lot.”¹⁰ The “asymmetric answer” took the shape of an embargo on Georgian products, discontinued air and postal communication, and the deportation of illegal Georgian migrants.

Doubts were voiced. A. Privalov has written the following in the same journal: “One wonders: what are the final aims of Russia’s sanctions? It is very important to understand this: either it should address the problems in earnest (migration and the markets are contaminated with corruption) to move them aside together with the anti-Georgian context. There is another option: the sanctions develop into frills and turn out to be a small victorious war and the state school of chauvinism. This should be prevented lest they become not merely another faux pas (there have been enough of them) but an Error. Such games are easy to start and next to impossible to stop.” The analyst is quite right when he writes: “To tell the truth the crisis of our relations with Georgia was a shallow one. If we respond to it in this way what shall we do when a real crisis occurs?”¹¹

A. Gromov, another expert, is looking for the roots of “anti-Georgian hysterics” elsewhere. He has asked: “What if the burning of bridges with Georgia is not a consequence, but the aim of Russia’s retaliation?” He believes that the fact that Russian policies oppose Georgia’s national interests is the main flaw of Russia’s policy in this country. This is true of the Russian ruling class’s negative attitude toward the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that strengthened, in his opinion, Georgia’s economic and political independence. By supporting the project, Russia could have created pro-Russian forces among the Georgian elite. The territorial issue is Georgia’s main concern, writes the Russian analyst, Russia should have worked toward preserving the status quo. Instead, it sided with the separatists. These were, in his opinion, systemic errors in Russia’s policy in Georgia during the post-Soviet period.

A. Gromov’s recommendations are paradoxical: he believes that Saakashvili acted with the aim of strengthening the anti-Russian national consensus and mobilizing the nation around himself. The analyst suggests starting a new game by proclaiming Russia an “anti-Georgian state.” This will deprive the Georgian leaders of their trump card, while the president will be forced to revise his tactics amid one of the most serious crises—any more or less serious move would have deprived him of Abkhazia and South Ossetia forever.¹²

Russian analysts are doing their best to find other reasons of the worsened relations between Russia and Georgia. Some of them are convinced that “Russia does not know why it needs Georgia, with all its huge problems of building up its statehood, at all.” Russia is building its policy in its opposition to the United States. P. Bykov and A. Gromov insist that “members of Russian power are not prepared to work with independent pro-Russian politicians” in Georgia. They have written: “Opposing America and the Color Revolutions became Russia’s total political idea across the post-Soviet expanse to the extent that it practically deprived it of the chance of creating a pro-Russian political force loyal to revolution.”

These authors are convinced that Mikhail Saakashvili tried to become the “Georgian Putin,” to restore his country’s territorial and statehood integrity yet failed to find the common tongue with the Kremlin. “He has succeeded in establishing the regime of personal power and creating a more or less effective army with American help. This separated Russia and Georgia even more.”

The authors of the article “Sredstvo iz arsenalala real politic” believe that the “frozen conflicts” issue reduce the compromise potential to the minimum and conclude: “Today Russia is facing the

¹⁰ V. Ionov, “Zagranitsa nam pomozhet,” *Ekspert*, 17 October, 2006.

¹¹ A. Privalov, “O nas, a ne o Gruzii,” *Ekspert*, 9 October, 2006.

¹² See: A. Gromov, “Smysl antigruzinskoi isterii,” *Ekspert*, 5 October, 2006.

challenging task of creating a new balance in its relations with Georgia and Georgia's Western partners—the U.S. and the EU."¹³

The critics of the Georgian president speak of his actions as “a theatre of the absurd.” A. Konovalov, president of the Institute of Strategic Research, insists that Mikhail Saakashvili is frantically looking for a way out of the political impasse—the actual and legal return of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Georgia—only to discover to his disappointment that neither Russia, nor the U.S., nor NATO are prepared to use force or throw their weight around to resolve the conflict for him.¹⁴ The Georgian president is fully aware of the quandary in which he and his republic have found themselves. He cannot use ultimatums (related to Russia's WTO membership, for example) as an anti-Russian weapon. “Tbilisi is not counting on a positive outcome of the protracted confrontation; nor does it probably want it—this will deprive it of the chance of turning to NATO for protection.”¹⁵

Russian analysts are calling on the Kremlin to abandon the myth-based Georgian policy and the remnants of the obsolete “Big Brother” policy and launch a much more pragmatic course, while not allowing the state's leaders to exceed “the limits of the acceptable and the possible.”¹⁶

Experts regard Georgia as a developing state with numerous problems, low economic development level, and limited economic and political resources. They are absolutely convinced that the “myth of an economic miracle” (which implies the republic's transit-service future) is unfounded. The Georgian “revolutionary leaders,” meanwhile, are engaged in looking for geopolitical sources of the country's capitalization and foreign investments (from Russia among other countries) needed to privatize the main industrial sectors (including strategic industries). The country's military structure and the authoritarian regime are receiving the lion's share of the newly found money. The social gap, which is wide enough as it is, is widening even more, the ruling class lacks the necessary cohesion, and the democratic institutions and values are undeveloped. This has forced the leaders to tighten their authoritarian grip on the state, look for fresh confirmation of their legitimacy in the West, and try to accelerate the country's membership in NATO.

According to Russian experts, this is going on against the background of the Georgian president's “improvisations,” who is meting out both peace initiatives and hostile anti-Russian steps. The Kremlin is being called upon to use all its foreign policy resources to make Russia's Georgian policy “strong, reactive, and responsive; Russia should drop its gallantry and niceties” together with the myth about special relations with the republic.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The post-Soviet myths are finding fertile ground in the contradictory developments of the post-Soviet political and economic systems. They are transitional and are giving rise to opposition to various trends, which is moving “stable instability” to the fore. Georgia's policy is tied to the negative segment of Russia-the West relations by its desire to profit from their political confrontation. Georgian-Russian relations remain engulfed by the anti-wave—there are still no positive ideals in this sphere. Georgia's process of political self-identification is far from complete, while Russia's Georgian policy, as well as its policy in the rest of the Caucasus, remains inconsistent.

The development vectors of the two countries, as well as their approaches to conflict settlement, are very different. This has been amply testified by their interpretation of the “alternative governments”

¹³ *Ekspert*, 9 October, 2006.

¹⁴ See: A. Konovalov, “Esli ne vragi, to kto?!” *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 42, 2006.

¹⁵ A. Bagrationi, “My ne sumasshedshie!” *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 43, 2006.

¹⁶ A. Skakov, “Krasnaia cherta dlia Tbilisi,” *Politicheskii zhurnal*, No. 37-38, 9 October, 2006.

in the conflict zones and the current formats of conflict settlement. The two countries do not agree on how to develop their relations, while the political technologists on both sides of the border insist on the enemy image. No neutral position is possible (the attempt to suggest that Georgia assume a neutral position failed); the same can be said about retaining a normal level of relations. Personal meetings between the two presidents failed to defuse the tension. In her interview to the *Expert* weekly, Speaker of the Georgian parliament Nino Burjanadze said: "The problems are created by different approaches to certain fundamental issues rather than the presidents' personal mutual dislike." Ms. Burjanadze had in mind Russia's unwillingness to see Georgia united and integrated into the European structures.¹⁷

In response, Russian analysts stress what President Putin has to say about Mikhail Saakashvili. He pointed out that there was continuity between the policies of the president-revolutionary and those of Stalin's minister of state security, Lavrentiy Beria. The Russian president said: "There is an obvious desire to pinch and provoke Russia" and concluded: "These people imagine that, protected by their foreign sponsors, they can feel comfortable and secure. But can they?"¹⁸

The latest meeting between the two presidents took place in St. Petersburg. Their contacts are still "consistently cool," but the sanction conditions have been alleviated somewhat. The main problems still exist, with no solution in sight. The thaw that followed the dangerous crisis of September-December 2006 was probably a tactical one. More likely than not it will be followed by another spiral of information warfare in which political myths will continue playing their destructive role and eating into cultural and political foundation created by centuries of joint existence in the same civilizational space.

¹⁷ *Expert*, 16 November, 2006.

¹⁸ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 October, 2006.

GEORGIA-RUSSIA: IN SEARCH OF CIVILIZED RELATIONS

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The relations between Georgia and Russia, which can hardly be called well-ordered, have escalated beyond the bilateral level to become a problem that has caught international attention. Some forces are trying to profit from the

present state of affairs, while others are doing their best to bring order to bilateral relations. To achieve this we should go to the root of the current tension. It is highly tempting to find a scapegoat, but I cannot describe myself as an impartial

observer qualified to do this. It is equally wrong “to spread the guilt between the sides” and boast of an objective and unbiased approach. I have

undertaken here to discuss the key issues responsible for the current situation and the far from simple quest for a model of civilized relations.

Relations Based on Accusations

The time has come to bury the past and take a look at the post-Soviet period, during which, it must be said, Georgian-Russian relations have been neither normal nor civilized. Russia is convinced that Georgia’s efforts to move closer to the West, its close contacts with the United States, and its loudly announced intention to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic structures are nothing more than manifestations of its hostile anti-Russian policy. Georgia is firmly convinced that Russia has not yet abandoned its imperial designs in the republic and is guilty of double standards: while paying lip service to Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, it is not only actively supporting the breakaway regimes in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, but also intends to annex both regions.

The publications (mainly those that appear in both countries) on Georgian-Russian relations brim with mutual accusations and reproaches. To sort things out, we should first discuss the main stereotypes and myths: to achieve civilized and rational relations we should expose and push them aside.

“Ungrateful Georgians” and the “the enemy disguised as a friend.” The following opinions in Russia have survived the death of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union to be reproduced in our time:

- Russia saved Georgia from aggressive Muslim Turkey and Iran; but for Russia, Georgia and the Georgians would have perished;
- Georgia joined Russia on its own free will; it was never annexed. Russian politicians were especially irritated by the statement by Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, who likened the two centuries of Russia’s domination in Georgia to the Tartar-Mongol yoke, the hardships of which have not yet been forgotten in Russia.

The above causes a lot of irritation among the Georgians: the Georgian czars did ask Russia, another Christian Orthodox country, for help to drive the enemies back and to unite Georgia. Instead, in 1801, in flagrant violation of the agreement, Russia annexed Georgia; later, in 1921, Soviet Russia occupied the Democratic Republic of Georgia and made it part of the Soviet Union.

“Bad” Georgians in Russia’s history. The Russian media are fond of accusing Stalin and Beria of making Russia a totalitarian state; the pair of them are held responsible for the repressions against the Abkhazians, Meskhetian Turks, Chechens, and other nationalities. Some lay the blame for the totalitarian empire on Stalin; others believe that Shevardnadze was responsible for its end. In both cases, Georgia is seen as the main culprit. There is the opinion that by supporting the Abkhazian separatists, Russia “was taking revenge on the very much hated Shevardnadze, who destroyed the Soviet Union.”

Some of the Western media seem to accept this thesis. A Western journalist, who used to write a lot about the relations between Georgia and Russia, pointed out: “Stalin, who was a Georgian, made Abkhazia part of Georgia.” What is “Soviet Abkhazia” and what happened earlier? The author seemed to ignore that “Stalin, who was a Georgian,” was among those who occupied and annexed the Democratic Republic of Georgia.

Georgia is a “failed state.” The Russian political circles are firmly convinced that Georgia is an artificial structure “within the borders outlined by Soviet power,” an ethnic mosaic, to be more exact. It survived as an administrative unit in the empire, but it is hardly viable as an independent state and may even fall apart.

This is one of the pet ideas of Russia’s imperial thought of today; it serves as the basis for all sorts of geopolitical projects mainly responsible for Russia’s aggressive treatment of Georgia.

In Georgia, this and similar statements are taken as another sign of Russia's hostility toward Georgia. Today, there is no serious political force on the Georgian scene that could support Russia, not the West.

The separatist regimes as a means of keeping Georgia in check. The thesis of Georgia's "lack of vital capacity" and its unreliability from Russia's point of view are two reasons why Russia supports the separatist regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian analysts are quite open about this: the regimes are being used to bring pressure on Georgia and its policy, even though from time to time more sober-minded experts describe Russia's support of Abkhazia "as not the wisest of steps:" it drove Georgia away from Russia and added fuel to the smoldering separatist sentiments in the Northern Caucasus.

The intention to join NATO as a manifestation of anti-Russian policy. Today, Georgia is mainly accused of seeking NATO membership—something that speaks of its "anti-Russian" intentions. Georgia, in turn, looks at the Alliance as a guarantee of its security.

The "pro-Western" elites and the "pro-Russian" public. The Russian media are fond of talking about the very limited segment of those who love the West in the pro-Western CIS countries. It is alleged that pro-Western sentiments are typical of a handful of politicians with no influence with or popularity among the public. The masses, who found themselves in appalling conditions thanks to the misrule of these people, look fondly at Russia. This is one of Russia's gravest blunders: during the post-Soviet elections, those politicians who were accused of pro-Russian sentiments stood no chance. The sanctions against Georgia and escalated tension in bilateral relations merely add more points to the people at the helm. The Georgian opposition accuses the government of escalating tension in Georgian-Russian relations to detract public attention from domestic to foreign problems, thus pushing critically-minded people to cast their votes for the ruling political force.

Georgia does not want "normal" relations with Russia. From time to time Russian journalists start moaning that normal relations with Georgia seem impossible; there is "nostalgia" over the "common fraternal past," when stability and well-being were taken for granted. More likely than not, "normality" is interpreted as Georgia's close integration with Russia. In Georgia, however, people feel that it is Russia that does not want normal relations with Georgia.

These and other myths and stereotypes still loom high in contemporary politics and in the relations between the two countries.¹

Vladimir Putin as Agha Muhammad Khan

Not infrequently, the past five centuries of uninterrupted relations are evoked to explain the present developments. In recent history, however, 9 April, 1989 is the key event in the chain of events that brought the two countries to their present relations. On that day, a peaceful rally and the Soviet riot police clashed in front of the House of Government on Rustaveli Prospekt. The savage reprisal determined much, if not all, of Georgia's future and its relations with Russia.

The Russian empire, alias the Soviet Union, is held responsible for the tragedy. "The nation cherishes the memory of those who died on that terrible night at the hands of savage riot policemen as

¹ For several years now, the Russian public has been treated to negative information about Georgia spread by the political and journalist communities. There is a commonly shared opinion (53 percent of the polled) that Georgia is the most dangerous country to live in or to travel across. It is the third unwelcome and unfriendly country in the world (after the United States and China). The All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Studies obtained these results during a sociological poll of 15-16 April, 2006 in six regions of Russia from 1,600 polled (see: *Sakartvelos respublika* (The Republic of Georgia), 26 April, 2006).

heroes,” wrote one of the Georgian newspapers on the eve of the 17th anniversary of the event.² On the same day, another newspaper pointed out that even though the riot policemen were only armed with shovels and were Russians, the army “was not Russian, it was the Soviet army” and “had nothing to do with Russia and the Russian people.”³ Still, few people in Georgia are prepared to accept the thesis about “Russia subjugated by the Soviet Union.”

It is hard to say what the Soviet leaders expected to achieve by moving the army against the peaceful rally. They probably intended to scare the Georgians and discourage others with the punishment. However, this merely accelerated the processes the Kremlin hoped to stem.

On 9 April, 1989, Moscow refused to talk to the Georgian public, which wanted independence; it still refuses to talk to Georgia today. The “confrontational model” of those days still dominates the relations between the two countries. Georgia suffered a lot because of this, yet Russia failed to restore its former influence; Georgia moved further away from Russia.

The post-Soviet period of Georgian-Russian relations brings to mind another period: the late 18th century, when Iran was losing its grip on the Southern Caucasus. In 1795, in an effort to fend off the Russian Empire, Iranian ruler Agha Muhammad Khan attacked the East Georgian kingdom, which tried to protect itself with Russia’s help. Assured of Russia’s help, Georgian czar Irakly II was ill-prepared for what followed. By attacking Georgia, the Iranian shah hoped to stop Russia, the results proved to be opposite: weakened Georgia fell an easy prey to Russia, while the Iranian invasion increased anti-Iranian sentiments in Georgia.⁴ The Iranian shah merely accelerated his country’s retreat from the Southern Caucasus. Iran would have acted wiser if, unable to conquer Georgia and yet willing to keep Russia away, it had strengthened Georgia instead of attacking it—Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus would have been made harder, if not impossible.

In the post-Soviet period, Russia resembles Iran of the late 18th century: it is trying to preserve its exclusive rights in the region with inadequate means; other world actors with their own interests will never allow Russia to restore its domination. To strengthen its position Russia has opted for the measures tested by Agha Khan at one time: struggle against Georgia, support of the separatist regimes, and sanctions. The architects of this policy expected to keep Georgia within Russia’s sphere of influence and achieved the opposite result: there were no grounds for a pro-Russian orientation in Georgia, while its pro-Western orientation grew even stronger.

Strange as it may seem, Russia’s Georgian policy would have been much more successful had it abandoned the separatist regimes to their fate. This would have defused the tension; the lifted economic sanctions would have revived the importance of the Russian market—Georgia has not yet found alternative markets for its products. The very low level of confidence in the northern neighbor affects Georgia’s policy to a great extent.

How Russia Can be Forced to Recognize Its Interests

There are few, if any, people in Georgia who do not want better relations with Russia. Cultural and historical links apart, the Russia Federation is Georgia’s largest economic partner, normal relations with which would have added vigor to the Georgian economy.

² See: *Sakartvelos respublika*, 8 April, 2006.

³ *Svobodnaia Gruzia*, 8 April, 2006.

⁴ At that time, Russia was an enemy: Georgians repeatedly (in 1802, 1804, 1812-1813) rebelled against it; Iran was an even greater enemy: Prince of Kartli-Kakhetia Alexander, who fled to Iran, called on his supporters in Georgia to rebel and assured them that he would not bring Iranian troops.

Georgia wonders what Russia wants. Some of the Georgian public and politicians are convinced that Georgia should first understand what Russia wants, then do everything it wants to achieve complete harmony.

Russian politicians and analysts who speak about Georgia and the Georgian media are often insulting and aggressive. Vice Speaker of the Russian State Duma Lyubov Sliska, for example, dismissed Georgia as a small country unworthy of sorting out its affairs at the international level: “We should grow accustomed to the thought that when dealing with a country with a population of 2.5 million and no larger than a Russian province, Russia should not raise its relations with it to the international level as it does when dealing with large and serious states.”⁵ This was said at an OSCE session in reply to the statements of the Georgian parliamentarians.

In September 2003, shortly before the Rose Revolution, *The Wall Street Journal* published a fairly long list of Moscow’s demands, which ran contrary to the interests of the United States and the West as a whole: Russia wants Georgia to abandon its politically and military cooperation with Washington and NATO; to let the Russian bases remain in Georgia for an indefinite period of time; to join the Russia-controlled Eurasian Alliance and the CSTO; and to become incorporated into the Russian transport and pipeline system.⁶

In plain words, this meant that Georgia should abandon its pro-Western orientation. It should be said that Georgia tried to establish good relations with Russia and take its interests into account. In 1994, having suffered defeat in Abkhazia, Eduard Shevardnadze signed a framework agreement on friendship and cooperation with Russia, a new version of the Treaty of Georgievsk.⁷ Having joined the CIS and agreed to the Russian bases’ continued presence in Georgia, the country remained in Russia’s “sphere of influence.” In exchange, Georgia asked Russia to help it develop its own army and restore its territorial integrity. This meant that Russia should have abandoned the breakaway regions—a compromise that Russia rejected as unpalatable.

Let’s take a closer look at what *The Wall Street Journal* says. Some of the demands are obsolete: Russia removed its bases from Georgia; the same can be said about much of the rest. This means that Russia’s policy is cutting back the number of its interests, which could have been preserved through a compromise.

Today, the Russian Federation is facing a choice that will determine the future of the Caucasus: it will either continue supporting the separatist regimes and keep trying to join them to Russia, which will create more economic problems for Georgia, etc. In response, Georgia will continue pushing Russia to the north of the Caucasian Range; it is moving toward NATO and is trying to involve other states in Caucasian affairs to decrease Russia’s influence.

There is another option: Moscow will not interfere with restoring Georgia’s territorial integrity, which will settle the most painful issue of bilateral relations. Cooperation will surge ahead, while Georgia will pay much more attention to Russia’s real interests in the region.

Until quite recently Moscow was not ready to make the U-turn—in fact, it had not much time to ponder on it.

The Fresh Start that Failed

We know what Russia wants of Georgia, but the answer is hardly conducive to better bilateral relations. Some time ago, Georgia finally realized that Russia’s true interests can be described as: a

⁵ *Sakartvelos respublika*, 3 July, 2005.

⁶ See: *24 saati* (24 hours), 23 September, 2003.

⁷ Under the agreement of 1783 between Irakly II and Catherine II, the Georgian czar pledged to gear his foreign policy to Russia’s interests and take part in all the wars that Russia waged in the Caucasus. In its turn, Russia pledged to keep an armed unit (of two battalions) in Georgia, come to Irakly’s help in the event of an attack, and support his efforts to unify Georgia. Very soon, however, Russia violated the treaty by annexing the Kartli-Kakhetia kingdom in 1801.

united, strong, and stable Georgia on Russia's southern borders, rather than a hostile country drawn into conflicts. The problem is how can we convince Russia.

After the Rose Revolution, Georgia's new leaders invited Russia to start everything from scratch; they tried to convince the Russian leaders that a "united and strong Georgia" on their country's southern borders was in their interests. The Georgian side interpreted "the fresh start" as an "equal partnership" between the two countries. Georgia pledged to recognize and take into account Russia's interests in the Caucasus, if they did not contradict the republic's state interests.

The new Georgian leaders offered a plan of "wide open doors" for Russian capital in exchange for Russia's discontinued support of the separatist regimes in Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. Immediately after the downfall of the Abashidze regime in Ajaria, President Saakashvili announced that the Russian capital in the region was absolutely safe and promised the same for the Russian money invested in Abkhazia when the republic returned to Georgia.

The policy that, on the one hand, offered Russia a large chunk of Georgia's economy in an effort to pacify it and, on the other, presupposed integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures proved to be contradictory to a certain extent and failed to remove the problems in the countries' bilateral relations. Most of the facilities offered for privatization were bought by Russians, while political tension continued. The issues related to the conflict regions remained pending. The West found it hard to accept Russia's economic plans in Georgia. For example, Gazprom, Russia's main political tool, wanted to buy Georgia's main gas pipeline; some people in the Georgian governments were lobbying its interests—but the Western experts and the United States were against this.⁸

Economic Sanctions Against Georgia

Those who accuse Georgia of anti-Russian provocations refer, first and foremost, to the detention of Russian servicemen suspected of spying.⁹ The critics say that the noise and PR campaign that accompanied the arrest were excessive. This is probably true—a small state should not produce a lot of noise. Russia's retaliation was inadequate in scope and duration. The sanctions are still in place; they were introduced even before the Russian officers were arrested, and were not lifted when they were transferred to Russia.

Russian politicians and experts are fond of saying that Georgia's economy depends on Moscow and that economic tools will "sober up" the country" or "bring pro-Russian people to power." The Russian Federation was Georgia's main economic partner,¹⁰ which made the blow very painful indeed.

This was a stage-by-stage process: first the visa regime, then the Russian market was closed to the main items of Georgia's export (fruit, herbs, mineral water, wine, and liquor), then the number of

⁸ Finally, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament Nino Burjanadze openly announced: "Any minister who starts talking about privatization of the gas pipeline will be fired immediately," while the U.S. Administration gave the Georgian authorities enough money under the Millennium Program to restore the pipeline.

⁹ The accusations against the Russian servicemen channeled bilateral relations in a different direction. "By accusing the Russian servicemen of terrorism," wrote Russian newspaper *Kommersant* on 25 July, 2005, "Georgia no longer expected bilateral relations to improve." In actual fact, Georgian politicians said in chorus that they did not want confrontation with Russia and that they hoped the competent Russian services would help their Georgian colleagues to detain those directly involved in planning and carrying out terrorist acts in Georgia (see: *Akhali taoba* (The New Generation), 28 July, 2005).

¹⁰ Between 1994 and 2003, trade turnover with Russia rose 5.6-fold: from \$40 to 225 million. Georgian export increased five-fold: from \$14 to 75.5 million (see: *Iveria*, 6 August, 2004). On the whole, out of the total volume of exported Georgian products worth \$445 million, \$76 million went to Russia, or 17 percent of the total. Seventy-five percent of exported wine and 80 percent of exported mineral water went to Russia.

Georgians allowed to work in Russia was cut back and illegal migrants were deported. These were measures designed to create serious problems for the Georgian leaders.

The Russian, Georgian, and Western media were quite open about the final goal: removal of Mikhail Saakashvili. *The Daily Telegraph* of Britain wrote that Moscow's measures should be interpreted as an attempt to undermine Georgia's economy and remove President Saakashvili.¹¹ The plan failed: the Georgian economy survived together with the president, who became even more popular.

On 22 January, 2007, President Putin restored diplomatic relations to their former scope by returning Russian Ambassador Viacheslav Kovalenko to Tbilisi. This triggered talks in the Russian media about Russia's defeat in economic warfare. *Kommersant*, for example, wrote that Putin changed his mind about punishing Georgia because the sanctions proved useless and even made Georgia more independent: "The situation in Georgia is not as awful as Moscow would have liked it to be" and "the anti-Georgian campaign seriously undermined Russia's image in Georgia and the West, as well as the position of the pro-Russian politicians in Georgia. The population became even more resolved to join NATO."¹²

The Georgian media pointed to the country's serious losses: the deported Georgians, the Russian market closed to Georgian products, and the escalated conflicts. *Akhali taoba* wrote: "Let us hope that the return of Viacheslav Kovalenko will not be taken as Georgia's victory and Russia's retreat. We all know that this was done because of big politics."¹³

Kommersant wrote that on 13 January, 2007 the RF Security Council decided the economic sanctions were inefficient and "the Kremlin's expectations that they would precipitate the fall of Saakashvili and his Cabinet had proven wrong."¹⁴

Part of the Russian political and analyst community insists that Russia never wanted to remove the Georgian president. Sergey Markov, Director of the Institute of Political Studies, has pointed out: "The main aim of the economic sanctions was achieved." He argued that they were intended to prevent Georgia's possible military operations in South Ossetia.¹⁵ Other aims were also achieved: the detained Russian officers were freed, the defense minister who "favored a military operation" was fired, the belligerent rhetoric subdued, etc.

Chairman of the State Duma Committee for the CIS Affairs and Relations with Fellow Countrymen Abroad Andrey Kokoshin went as far as saying that the economic sanctions had wakened up the West and that "the Western partners were no longer pushing Georgia against Russia."¹⁶

Contrary to the expectations, the economic sanctions were not lifted. Experts believe that there is no hope of better relations with Russia and that both countries are suffering from this, however, Georgia was hit worse than Russia.

Former Foreign Minister of Georgia Irakly Menagarishvili believes that the confrontation is being fed not so much by the subjective factors as by both countries' highly divergent development vectors. This means that until the Caucasian region acquires its final shape, relations will remain in turmoil. The former foreign minister concluded: "Russia should accept Georgia's Euro-Atlantic choice as final and immutable. Georgia, in turn, should assure Russia that its membership in NATO will not damage Russia's interests."¹⁷

Today, Russia is not ready to accept Georgia's Euro-Atlantic bias and NATO membership; domestic problems are adding to the tension between the two countries. Former Georgian Ambassa-

¹¹ See: *Akhali versia* (The New Version), 24-25 January, 2007.

¹² *Alia*, 20-21 January, 2007; *Akhali taoba*, 20 January, 2007.

¹³ *Akhali taoba*, 20 January, 2007.

¹⁴ *Kommersant*, 19 January, 2007.

¹⁵ *Rezonans*, 25 January, 2007.

¹⁶ *Akhali versia*, 24-25 January, 2007.

¹⁷ *24 saati*, 7 March, 2007.

dor to the Russian Federation Zurab Abashidze believes that in view of the coming presidential election, the Kremlin might need Georgia as an enemy. He is calling on the Georgian leaders to tread cautiously in Moscow's direction in order to prevent new crises.

There is the opinion in Georgia that the Georgian leaders are profiting from the tension to a certain extent. "The Russians need a Caucasian enemy, while the Georgians benefit from a non-European enemy. If Russia did not exist, it would have been invented," writes Ramaz Sakvarelidze. Giya Khukhashvili agrees with that: "This confrontation improved the personal ratings of Mikhail Saakashvili and Vladimir Putin, but damaged the situation in both countries."¹⁸

The economy is suffering because of the political confrontation, and Georgia's losses are much greater: the country lost a capacious market and an important supplier of raw materials.

Today, Russia is out to show Georgia its importance by using economic tools; this is done in a rude and even insulting way, which breeds nothing but the desire to move as far as possible from this country.

Georgia's Conditions for Russia's WTO Membership

Russia's WTO membership is another stumbling block in the two countries' bilateral relations: to join it Russia needs Georgia's consent, while the latter insists on Russia fulfilling its earlier self-assumed obligations to legalize the checkpoints on the Psou River (the Abkhazian stretch of the Georgian-Russian border) and at the Roksky tunnel (the Osset stretch of the same border). Today, Russia is using the points to maintain contacts with the breakaway regimes. Georgia insists that in their present form the checkpoints are illegal and that it should be allowed to send its customs services and border guards to man them. Foreign Minister of Georgia Gela Bezhuashvili has promised: "By fulfilling this condition Russia will remove Georgia's objections to its WTO membership."¹⁹

The Georgian leaders are very firm: if the conditions are not fulfilled, Tbilisi will never agree on Russia joining the WTO. Russia, in turn, seems absolutely unmoved: Russia believes that it will join the WTO without Georgia's consent—the latter's position will simply be ignored. It is hoped that the United States and the West, which want to see Russia in the WTO, will put pressure on Georgia.

Some Georgian experts are puzzled by the Georgian leaders' position on Russia's WTO membership. Instead, they think, Georgia should stress the point of returning to the Russian market rather than concentrating on the checkpoints, which Russia would never accept.

The Georgian leaders intend to stick to their guns. This is a rigid position, however, it has moved the key problem to the forefront. Tbilisi wants Moscow to demonstrate with practical steps that it recognizes Georgia's territorial integrity. Whether the republic can defend its position is another matter.

"Russia Wants to See Georgia a Neutral State"

When removing its military bases from Georgia, Russia tried to obtain the promise that no foreign bases would appear on its territory in the future; the Russian leaders even wanted to include this

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ *24 saati*, 26 January, 2007.

obligation in the framework agreement between the two countries. In December 2005, a representative of the Russian embassy in Georgia told the ITAR-TASS agency that the text had been agreed upon, apart from the point under which Georgia pledged not to deploy foreign troops on its territory.²⁰ The Georgians were dead set against this, but agreed to ask the parliament to vote on a ban on the deployment of foreign military facilities on Georgian territory.

This was closely followed by a worsening of relations once more and suspension of the talks. On 6 February, 2007, after returning to Tbilisi, Russian Ambassador Kovalenko called a press conference, which was broadcast to Moscow. The most memorable of his statements was: "Russia wants to see Georgia a neutral state."²¹ For the local experts, this sounded like nothing short of an ultimatum.²²

Viacheslav Kovalenko pointed out that Georgia had the unique chance to become a neutral state because "it has no belligerent neighbors" and went on to say: "Russia has no egotistical interests in Georgia, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia," "neutrality should not be interpreted as restrictions on contacts with the West," Georgia would profit from neutrality, said he, it was a great advantage, which many countries sought and from which they profited.²³

This statement, which was not accompanied by any suggestions regarding the most burning issues, caused a negative response. As long as Russia continues to support the separatist regimes and avoid any practical steps toward restoring Georgia's territorial integrity, it will not succeed in preventing Georgia's NATO membership. From time to time the Georgian leaders state that Georgia will never abandon its course toward the Alliance—most of the opposition agrees with them on this point.

Will Russia Take the "Risky Step"?

The developments in the Caucasus might be closely related with what happens in Kosovo. Russian officials stated long ago that if Kosovo acquires its independence in disregard of Serbia's position, this will become a precedent to be applied to the post-Soviet conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Certain Russian political analysts have been urging the Russian leaders to do this.

Georgian experts think this might prove "too risky"—the repercussions will be hard to predict. Georgian-Russian relations will become even worse: foreign political observers and scientists agree that the peak of bilateral tension is still to come.²⁴

It is highly naïve to believe that, after taking Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region from Georgia, Russia will be pacified enough to sort things out with "the rest of Georgia" in a civilized way. The victory of Russia's policy in the breakaway regions will totally discredit the Western orientation not only in Georgia, but also across the Southern Caucasus and will spell the defeat of American, and Western, policy in the post-Soviet South.

Had peacekeepers other than Russian been stationed in the separatist regions, Sukhumi and Tskhinvali would have been much more pliable and progress in the desired direction much more noticeable.

²⁰ See: *Rezonans*, 1 December, 2005.

²¹ "Rossia khotela by videt' Gruziu neytral'noy stranoy," available at [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/778077.html>], 6 February, 2007.

²² See: *24 saati*, 7 February, 2007.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ See, for example, an article by Lithuanian political scientist Saulus Lebauskas, in which he predicted an armed conflict between Georgia and Russia in 2008 (*Delfi*, 21 June, 2007).

DYNAMICS OF RUSSIAN-KYRGYZ RELATIONS: FROM THE CENTER-PERIPHERY TO UNILATERAL DEPENDENCE?

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By Central Asian standards, Kyrgyzstan is a relatively small country. Its natural riches are limited to gold and water resources; other than that it has nothing to offer on the global and regional scale, which explains its insignificant geopolitical weight. Tucked away in a corner of the region, it is isolated from the main routes of Asian freight turnover and its mountains make transit unprofitable (especially compared with its neighbors).

It cannot deal on an equal footing with its large neighbors—Kazakhstan, China, and Uzbekistan; potential investors prefer to keep away from the region with its unstable or potentially unstable countries, such as Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. The image of a backward country, from which its citizens are leaving in hundreds of thousands to seek employment elsewhere and which is short of skilled workers, does nothing to attract money to the Kyrgyz economy. Its economic environment—closed to foreign investors and non-transparent because of corruption and clientelism—can hardly tempt real money.

The country's geopolitical situation is highly disadvantageous, partly because of outside factors on which the Kyrgyz elite, no matter what shape it is in, has no influence. The country is an

obvious regional, Eurasian, and even Asian periphery.¹

However, in keeping with Mackinder's theory of the Heartland as applied to Central Asia,² people are apt to believe that the country's situation is not hopeless. This looks like an exercise in wishful thinking.

I have undertaken here to explain how the Kyrgyz leaders tried to respond to the geopolitical developments and to trace the dynamics of the relations with the former Center, very much affected by a certain amount of latent momentum in their bilateral relations. The larger part of the local elite regards Russia as a center of gravity that could and should be consulted. Seen from Moscow, the Kyrgyz capital looks like the center of a former Soviet republic, that is, on the periphery of its sphere of influence to be treated, because of its obvious weakness, with a certain amount of condescension. This approach shaped a certain type of relations and contributed, albeit indirectly, to certain obstacles and problems.

¹ On Kyrgyzstan's geopolitical situation, see, for example: M. Suiunbaev, "Kyrgyzstan: A Geopolitical Portrait," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (31), 2005.

² See: S. Matikeeva, "Mackinder's Legacy: Was It a Prophecy?" *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (34), 2005.

The article has been prepared within the MSM0021620841 "Rozvoj české společnosti v EU: výzvy a rizika." The author expresses his gratitude to the Bishkek Institute for Public Policy, which organized and financed his studies in Kyrgyzstan in March 2007.

The Trends and Turns of Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Policy

For the reasons described above, the country's choice of foreign policy maneuvers is very limited, but former President Akaev, who dedicated much more time to and poured more efforts into his country's foreign policy than the republic's Foreign Ministry, tried to create the best possible image of his small state worldwide. This approach laid the foundation for several foreign policy program documents, the Silk Road Diplomacy among them, authored by the president himself.³

The multivector nature of the country's foreign policy was the linchpin on which everything else hinged: the republic recognized the interests of several countries (particularly Russia, China, and the U.S.) in Central Asia; and sustainable relations with neighbors formed another foreign policy cornerstone. Kyrgyzstan orientated itself toward the CIS countries as markets for its products. They, primarily Russia, were the guarantors of the republic's security, even though the potential of such guarantees was in doubt. The CIS countries, particularly Kazakhstan and Russia, "import" a large number of Kyrgyz workers, which is reducing social tension inside the country.

The possibility of working together with the developed states (the EU, U.S., and Japan) in anticipation of financial aid was treated as a priority. In fact, in the early years of independence, President Akaev created a very positive image of his republic abroad, which opened access to all sorts of grants from these countries. It was at that time that local and foreign NGOs started mushrooming in the republic in numbers unrivaled elsewhere in the region. Aspersions may be cast on the ways the money was used or the efficiency of the international organizations themselves, yet on the whole the money flow was an obviously positive phenomenon.

Among the other main Central Asian actors, China is critically important for Kyrgyzstan because of considerable commercial immigration from China and Chinese investments and grants. Recently China has also been offering different kinds of loans in order to attract Kyrgyzstan.⁴

The Silk Road Diplomacy presupposes the republic's involvement in building the architecture of regional integration. Its membership in all the Central Asian integration structures (the CSTO, Customs Union/EurAsEC, and SCO) is expected to reinforce the republic's international position. The republic's membership in the WTO and Customs Union (which it joined simultaneously)⁵ fulfilled one of the key political tasks formulated by President Akaev.

The republic used America's fast infiltration into the region in the fall of 2001 in its own interests, but the deployment of the American military at the Manas airport caused a veritable storm in the public and the local media;⁶ the SCO members did not remain passive onlookers either.

The other foreign policy vectors are relatively weak even though the republic's foreign policy doctrine treated the Middle East and Southeast Asia as priorities.

³ See: A. Akaev, "Diplomatiya sholkovogo puti. Proshloe i nastoiashchee Velikogo Sholkovogo puti." The text appeared on the site of the Foreign Ministry of Kyrgyzstan as an official document of the country's foreign policy, available at [http://www.mfa.kg/index_ru.php?section=&article=37], 10 August, 2004.

⁴ See: M.S. Imanaliev, "Kyrgyzsko-kitayskie otnosheniya na sovremennom etape," *Rukopisi Instituta obshchestvennoy politiki*, August 2006.

⁵ See: K. Isaev, "Vostok—delo tonkoe," *ili Litso kyrgyzskoy vlasti glazami ochevidtza*, TAS, Bishkek, 2006, pp. 113-115.

⁶ The local public treats the American base and the Russian base that appeared in the country two years later differently. While the Americans are treated with a share of caution, the Kant airbase is viewed positively. Any blunder of the American servicemen causes indignation, while the Russians are willingly tolerated. In fact, so far they look like "ours." For more on the military aspects of the relations between Kyrgyzstan and the United States, see: M. Kazakpaev, "U.S.-Kyrgyzstan: Partners in Different Weight Divisions," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (39), 2006.

Kyrgyzstan is pursuing two main foreign policy courses. The first is the Russia-Central Asia-China vector; all of them are the republic's main trade partners, to which the republic sells its products and workforce. Despite its obvious attractions, this course has its shady sides (the far from simple relations with the Central Asian neighbors, China's and Russia's policies, which can be described as post-colonialist, and the contradictions between these two key regional actors).

The second course, which involves distant, but no less important players, is formed by the EU (+ OSCE), the U.S., and Japan. They have not yet acquired definite interests in the region (this is especially true in the case of Europe), yet they may serve as a counterweight to the first course.⁷ The former president favored a policy of mutual complementarity of the great powers in Central Asia.⁸ Balancing is fairly tricky: the gap between the two courses has become dangerously wide. Recently, the close, not distant (and not always reliable), neighbors have stepped up their involvement in the country, which made its foreign and domestic policy a little bit "schizophrenic." The republic is making many promises right and left at present in order to remain everyone's ally: this is costing it its partners' confidence.⁹

Political and Diplomatic Relations

Bilateral relations between sovereign Kyrgyzstan and Russia began in June 1991 when Boris Yeltsin arrived in Bishkek to sign an agreement on the principles of interstate relations between the Kyrgyz Republic and the R.S.F.S.R.¹⁰ A year later, in June 1992, the countries signed a standard interstate treaty.¹¹ The permanent representation office of Kyrgyzstan in Moscow became the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic.¹² In September 1992, Russia reciprocated with opening its embassy in Bishkek. Diplomatic relations became even wider when, on 1 January, 2002, the Russian Federation opened its General Consulate in Osh. Kyrgyzstan opened a similar office in Ekaterinburg, the republic's very important economic partner and a center of attraction for its workforce.

Political contacts and summits are frequent: official and working visits of Kyrgyzstan's premier and president are almost annual affairs; Kyrgyz diplomats visit Russia more often than any other country of the world.

After 2000 when Vladimir Putin became president, the contacts at the top level became even more frequent. The Russian president paid much more attention to the other Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan in particular), yet Kyrgyzstan became Russia's strategic ally.¹³

⁷ See: L. Imanalieva, "The Main Results of the Democratic Reforms and Foreign Policy in Kyrgyzstan during Its Years of Independence," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (12), 2001, p. 82.

⁸ See: A. Shumilin, "Rossia i Tsentral'naia Azia: vzaimnoe pritiiazhenie," *GlobalAffairs.ru*, available at [http://www.globalaffairs.ru/live/article.asp?rubric_id=1478&id=4448®ion_id=1299#], 18 February, 2004.

⁹ In 2005-2006, the American base issue was a typical example of this: on the one hand, in 2005, the SCO countries (Kyrgyzstan among them) demanded in Astana that America should remove its troops from the region; on the other, Kyrgyzstan could not reject the much higher rent.

¹⁰ For the text of the treaty see: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.). Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Compiled and authored by G.A. Rudov, ed. by V.M. Ploskikh, Ilim, Bishkek, 2001, pp. 33-38.

¹¹ Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation of 10 June, 1992. For the text of the treaty see: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, pp. 40-45.

¹² See: "Protokol ob ustanovlenii diplomaticheskikh otnosheniy mezhdru Rossiiskoy Federatsiei i Kyrgyzskoi Respublikoy, Kiev, 20 marta 1992 g.," in: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, p. 39.

¹³ This should not be overestimated: Russia acquired many "strategic partners." Strategic partnership with Kyrgyzstan was officially registered in Art 1 of the Declaration of Perpetual Friendship, Allied Relations and Partnership between the

The key event of Vladimir Putin's first presidential term was his visit to Kyrgyzstan in October 2003, when the Russian airbase of the CSTO Collective Rapid Deployment Forces was opened.¹⁴

The results of diplomatic relations were less impressive than their intensity. The declarations were mere words, while Russia turned out to be an unreliable partner: during the events of spring 2005 when Askar Akaev stepped up diplomatic activity¹⁵ in the hope of enlisting Moscow's support, the latter was already investigating the opposition's potential and tilling the soil for alternative developments.

Following the events of March 2005, the former president and his family were granted asylum in Russia, but Moscow was talking about relations with the new people in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁶ This was easy: under President Bakiev, the pro-Russian vector of the republic's foreign policy became more pronounced. In 2005, even more Kyrgyz delegates visited Moscow; the country's leaders coordinated with Russia everything that was said about the American base in 2006.

This means that in two years the multi-vector balance of the country's foreign policy was tipped; the United States, as one of the important components, lost its position.¹⁷ The republic was drawn into Russia's orbit, something that the public also wanted.

Relations in the Military Sphere

Relations between Kyrgyzstan and Russia in the security sphere are close enough; Kyrgyzstan inherited all the military equipment stationed in its territory by the time the Soviet Union ceased to exist, which means that the CIS borders with the outside world were still manned by Russian border guards.¹⁸ They remained there until 1999 when Kyrgyzstan finally negotiated their withdrawal.¹⁹ This was not the end: an operational group of Russia's border guards stayed behind to train the local border guard service.²⁰ Russia retained the Test Base of Anti-Submarine Equipment of the RF Navy on Lake Issyk Kul and the navy communications center in the settlements of Spartak and Chaldovar.²¹

Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic of 27 July, 2000 signed in Moscow (see: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossiia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, pp. 167-173).

¹⁴ See: *Diplomaticheskii vestnik*, November 2003.

¹⁵ See: *Kommersant*, 21 January, 2005. Askar Akaev took part in the celebrations of Moscow State University's 250 anniversary and was present at the reception in the Kremlin.

¹⁶ See: "Feliks Koulov: Rossiia—nash luchshiy drug, a druzey nel'zia meniat. Pervyi vitse-premier Kirgizii," *Kommersant*, No. 95 (3179), 27 May, 2005, available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/news2.php4?st=1117169460>], 1 June, 2005.

¹⁷ It should be said in this connection that Russia took prompt advantage of the worsened attitude of the Kyrgyz public toward America's military presence in the republic. The demonstrative transfer of old aircraft after the incident at the Manas airport was presented as an act of friendship between Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁸ See: "Soglashenie mezhdru Rossiiskoy Federatsii i Kyrgyzskoi Respublikoy o statuse pogranichnykh voysk Rossiiskoy Federatsii, nakhodiashchikhsia na territorii Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki, ot 9 oktiabria 1992 g.," "Dogovor mezhdru Rossiiskoy Federatsii i Kyrgyzskoi Respublikoy o sotrudnichestve v voennoy oblasti, ot 5 iulia 1993 g.," in: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossiia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, pp. 76-79.

¹⁹ See: "Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoy Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki o poriadke peredachi Kyrgyzskoi Respublike pod okhranu uchastkov ee gosudarstvennoy granitsy, okhraniaemykh Federal'noy pogranichnoy sluzhboy Rossiiskoy Federatsii, ot 17 iulia 1999 g.," available at [http://www.businesspravo.ru/Docum/DocumShow_DocumID_84308.html], 10 August, 2004.

²⁰ See: "Soglashenie mezhdru Kyrgyzskoy Respublikoy i Rossiiskoy Federatsii o sotrudnichestve po pogranichnym voprosam (Bishkek, 17 June, 1999). Prilozhenie: Polozhenie o poriadke finansirovaniya Operativnoy grupy Federal'nykh pogranichnykh sil RF v Kyrgyzskoy Respublike," in: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossiia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, pp. 154-165 (see also: D. Fayzullaev, "Rossia-Kirghizia: ekonomicheskoe sotrudnichestvo nabiraet oboroty," *Azia i Afrika segodnia*, No. 10, 2005, p. 33.

²¹ See: "Soglashenie mezhdru Rossiiskoy Federatsii i Kyrgyzskoy Respublikoy o poriadke ispol'zovaniya rossiiskikh voennykh ob'ektov na territorii Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki i statuse voennosluzhashchikh Vooruzhennykh sil Rossiiskoy Fed-

The war in Afghanistan and the ensuing American presence in Kyrgyzstan forced Russia to “discover” idling Soviet military infrastructure in the republic.

Bishkek intended to host the SCO structures, particularly the antiterrorist center, but China and Russia preferred to have Tashkent as the host site.

In Kyrgyzstan, Russia limited its military activities to the CSTO; the agreement on the Russian airbase in Kant was the key event of this cooperation.²² Moscow found it profitable to use the base that formally belonged to the CSTO: it could demand its free use. The results of the 2005-2006 meetings of the two presidents presuppose that the base will be expanded: so far, Russia’s presence is minimal and its military importance is negligible. The base serves to demonstrate Russia’s force.

Moscow allowed Kyrgyzstan—and all the other CSTO members—to buy military vehicles and equipment at Russia’s domestic prices. In fact, this is the structure’s main integration factor, through which Russia “subsidizes” its members’ loyalty. In 2004 alone, Russia supplied Kyrgyzstan with military equipment totaling \$2.3 million.²³

At first glance, military cooperation between Russia and Kyrgyzstan looks active enough, but the real results are much more modest. In Russia’s case, this is the base in Kant. Russia’s air forces will be much less useful in the event of a real threat in the form of small groups of Islamic terrorists acting in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan’s case, the Russian base makes up for the absence of its own air force. In this way, Russia is cementing its regional status on a highly advantageous basis (at the expense of the CSTO).

The Economic Component of Mutual Relations

The economic reforms in Kyrgyzstan and Russia were carried out according to the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund and caused the most profound economic collapse in the CIS.²⁴ The revival that began in 1995 was cut short by Russia’s default of August 1998. From that time on, Kyrgyzstan became much less dependent on the Russian market than before—Moscow is still the most important, yet not dominant, partner. The plummeting purchasing power of the local people attracted cheap Chinese products. The opening of a gold mining enterprise in Kumtor (on the south shore of Lake Issyk Kul), which extracts up to 17 tons of gold mainly bought by Switzerland, was a very important event against a fairly discouraging background.²⁵

The republic’s state debt to Russia plays an important role in bilateral relations. In 1992-1993, under bilateral agreements, Russia issued Kyrgyzstan loans totaling \$272 million to buy Russian raw materials, machinery, and equipment.²⁶ In the latter half of the 1990s, Kyrgyzstan received more

eratsii v Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, ot 5 iulia 1993 g.,” in: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, pp. 80-87.

²² Intergovernmental Agreement on the Status and the Conditions of Deployment of the Russian Base in the Territory of the Kyrgyz Republic of 22 September, 2003. Ratified and enacted on 11 August, 2005.

²³ See: *Akipress.org*, 26 April, 2004.

²⁴ The GDP level of 1994 is estimated at 63 percent lower than in 1990 (see: N.A. Volgina, M.S. Gafarly, *Slozhnosti i protivorechia perekhoda k sovremennoy rynochnoy ekonomike. Postsovetskaiia Tsentral’naia Azia. Poteri i obretenia*, Vostochnaia literature Publishers, Moscow, 1998, p. 321). About Kyrgyzstan’s economy see: L. Tchantouridze, “Kyrgyzstan at a Crossroads: Facing the Economic Causes of the Tulip Revolution,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (40), 2006. For an overview of the Kyrgyz economy see: G. Gleason, *Markets and Politics in Central Asia: Structural Reform and Political Change*, Routledge/Curzon, London, 2003, pp. 65-81.

²⁵ See: *Vneshniaia trgovlia stran SNG 2003*, Mezghosudartvennyi statisticheskiy komitet SNG, Moscow, 2004, p. 232.

²⁶ See: *Vneshniaia zadolzhennost’ stran-chlenov SNG; sostoianie, dinamika, perspektivy*, IMEPO RAS, Moscow, 1998, p. 31.

loans of a technical nature to be spent on renovating the aircraft fleet of Kyrgyz State Airlines, on equipment for the Bishkek thermal power plant, and on textbooks for Russian-language schools. The money was squandered due to the incompetence of the local bureaucrats and corruption.²⁷ In this way, Moscow increased the republic's dependence on the Russian products, at least in the spheres that particularly interested Moscow. The treaties allowed Russia to use credits to put pressure on Bishkek.

Under the new treaties signed in March 1996, Russia should have acquired the shares of several Kyrgyz enterprises as part of the republic's restructured state debt.²⁸ The issue is still pending. In 2000, Russia restructured Kyrgyzstan's state debt by writing off \$40 million and postponing payment of the rest. According to the statements coming from Moscow, however, this practice will be discontinued.²⁹

After 2000, Russian investments have been rising every year from practically nothing to several million dollars.³⁰ Wimm-Bill-Dann made the largest contribution to the Kyrgyz economy: it bought and refurbished the Bishkeksut plant, and the products are exported to neighboring countries (South Kazakhstan).³¹ In 2003-2004, Russian investments in the republic's economy remained stable at a level of about \$11 million.³²

As in Tajikistan, energy in Kyrgyzstan too is one of the key branches in which Russian companies are interested. RAO UES was expected to finish building the Kambarat-1 and Kambarat-2 hydro-power stations; the corresponding agreement was signed in January 2004.³³ Nothing has happened so far because of the Russian side's vague intentions to study the situation at the facilities. The fact that both hydropower stations were removed from the Law on the Special Status of the Toktogul Hydro-power Stations passed by the republic's parliament in June 2007 may radically change the situation: Russian business might lose the right to complete the projects.³⁴

Energy supplies to the Russian market started in 2003 were suspended; the talks resumed in 2007 are still underway.³⁵ To become a regional energy power, Kyrgyzstan should first attract huge foreign investments; the talks about building power lines did not begin until 2006.³⁶ As distinct from Tajikistan,

²⁷ See: K. Isaev, op. cit., pp. 89-110.

²⁸ The Russian side should have received shares of the Kyrgyz chemical-metallurgical concern in the Kemin District, car engines, a joint-stock company, and part of the Kyrgyzkabel plant together with the Bishkek car assembly plant (see: "Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki i Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoy Federatsii o sotrudnichestve v oblasti elektroenergetiki, ot 28 marta 1996 g.," "Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki i Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoy Federatsii o restrukturalizatsii zadolzhennosti Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki po gosudarstvennym kreditam, predstavlenym Rossiiskoy Federatsiei, ot 28 marta 1996 g.," in: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suverennykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, pp. 412-414, 442-444, respectively).

²⁹ See: "Rossia ne spishet dolgi bedneyshim stranam," *Centrasia*, 8 March, 2007, available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1173414420>], 9 March, 2007.

³⁰ Russia invests much less than other countries: in the first nine months of 2006, Russia was the sixth in terms of volume of direct investments; its share in the total flow of direct investments being about 3.5 percent, according to the preliminary figures of the Bishkek National Institute of Statistics, available at [<http://www.stat.kg/Rus/Home/express-invest.html>], 7 March, 2007.

³¹ In 2002, the company invested about \$7.5 million, bringing the total volume of Russia's investments to \$17 million a year (see: D. Fayzullaev, op. cit., p. 35).

³² See: *Investitsii v Kyrgyzskoy Respublike 2002-2004 godov*, The National Committee for Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2005.

³³ See: A. Bel'skiy, "Pokhod Chubaysa na Vostok," *Respublika*, No. 4 (04), 3 September, 2004, p. 12; Press release of RAO UES of 21 January, 2004, available at [http://www.rao-ees.ru/ru/pobeda_60/news/news/pr_archiv/show.cgi?pr210104rap.htm], 7 March, 2007.

³⁴ See: *24.kg*, 19 June, 2007.

³⁵ In 2003, Kyrgyzstan exported 713.9 million kWh of electric power to Russia; in 2004, 1,800 million (see: *Vneshniaia torgovlia Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki 2002-2004*, National Committee for Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2005, pp. 110-111).

³⁶ Rosatom of Russia, as well as the American AEC corporation, displayed an interest in the project (see: *24.kg* Information Agency, 26 June and 16 December, 2006).

Kyrgyzstan failed to attract foreign investors to create a competitive environment for the fairly passive Russians.

Cooperation with Gazprom, which has been controlling gas deliveries from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan since 2006, is very important for the republic.³⁷

The republic's membership in the WTO (since 1998) has become a stumbling block in its relations with Russia. From the Kyrgyz point of view, the Customs Union (which Kyrgyzstan joined in 1996) profited from the republic's WTO membership, but it was interpreted by the countries of the Customs Union as a violation of the Union's principles. After joining the WTO, Kyrgyzstan acquired the possibility of importing cheap goods from other WTO members (including China and the Southeast Asian countries) and re-exporting them to "its own" sales markets (Russia and Kazakhstan). Bishkek insists that it is highly important to keep petty trade between Russia and Kyrgyzstan alive because trade in Chinese, its own, and other goods is of huge social importance for Kyrgyzstan.³⁸

In the economy, as well as in politics, asymmetry is glaring.³⁹ Moscow is holding onto certain economic tools in the form of limiting Kyrgyz exports to the Russian Federation. Kyrgyzstan cannot respond in kind.

So far the Russian companies that enjoy political support are still in a very favorable position when it comes to investments in Kyrgyzstan. As compared with its rival Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan is more open from the point of view of access and communications.

So far, the Russian companies have failed to fulfill their promises, especially in the politically important spheres, of which energy is one. Pointing out their failure to obey the agreements and the threat of inviting Central Asian rivals may help to change the situation.

Russians in Kyrgyzstan

Russians came to the valleys of northern Kyrgyzstan in the last third of the 19th century.⁴⁰ From the very beginning, there was an imbalance between the north and the south in this respect, which explains why under Soviet power and in the post-Soviet period, the people in the north were much more Russified than in the south. Today, this is one of the psychological justifications of the country's division into the north and the south.

In the early 1990s, Kyrgyzstan, like its Central Asian neighbors, developed an open anti-Russian bias. Coupled with the ethnic conflict in the south, it created an outflow of Russians. In 1992-1993, 104 and 110 thousand, respectively, left the country; the majority of them were skilled Rus-

³⁷ M. Karayianni, "Russia's Foreign Policy for Central Asia Passes through Energy Agreements," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (22), 2003, pp. 93-94. In actual fact, this purely theoretical mechanism failed to deliver Kyrgyzstan from its dependence on its neighbor. Every year, the two countries have to settle problems in the sphere of gas deliveries: the republic cannot pay for its gas on time.

³⁸ See: A. Elebaeva, "Migration in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Trends, and Types," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (18), 2002, p. 151.

³⁹ On the whole, one can say that in the last few years the volume of trade with Russia has more than doubled. While in 2000, Kyrgyz export to Russia reached the figure of \$65 million, in 2004, it was nearly \$138 million; the figures for import are \$132.6 and \$293.7 million, respectively (see: *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki*, National Committee for Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2006, pp. 110-113). Russia outstripped Switzerland, the largest importer of Kyrgyz products.

⁴⁰ On the eve of the 1917 revolution, there were over 92 thousand Russian-speaking people in the Pishpek and Przhhevsk uyezds (nearly 40 percent of the total Russian population) (for more detail, see: G. Gorbukova, *Russkaia diaspora v Kyrgyzstane*, Sham Publishers, Bishkek, 2003, pp. 12-48).

sians. By the mid-1990s, the flow stabilized.⁴¹ In 2004, there were 502 thousand Russians in the republic, or 9.9 percent of the total population (the share for 1989 being 21.5 percent). The trend has not yet been stemmed.⁴² The outflow increased after March 2005, even though the revolutionary events were not anti-Russian at all.⁴³ Since 2005, latent nationalism has been mounting, which obviously alarmed those who wanted to and could emigrate.

So far, everyday ethnic relations remain stable: the Russians have preserved their social and material status; as distinct from Uzbekistan, where Russian job seekers are openly discriminated against, there is no discrimination in this sphere in Kyrgyzstan, with the exception of structures where knowledge of the Kyrgyz language is a must. This means that Russians are excluded from state offices, but, as distinct from neighboring republics, they can still be seen in many departments. There is no discrimination in the private sector dominated by the clans, which explains why there are almost no Russians there. Petty trade is still Russian, but Russians are in the minority there.

The Language, Media, and Education as the Outposts of Russia's Influence

The local Russians, the Russian language, education in Russian, the Russian media, and culture are the key factors of Russia's influence in Kyrgyzstan.

In 1996, the Russian tongue was accepted as the means of communication among various ethnic groups, in 1998, it became the republic's official language,⁴⁴ yet this failed to stem the exodus of highly qualified Russian speakers. So far it remains unclear how the law can be applied in practice.⁴⁵ Despite the present state and use of the Russian language at the official and state level, it will gradually lose its importance.

The media, particularly the electronic media, are one of the outposts of the Russian language in the republic: the Russian media are considered to be more influential. In book printing, the situation is more balanced; Russian TV programs are broadcast across the republic under corresponding agreements⁴⁶ and are very popular and influential. Kyrgyz TV has Russian-language programs too. Russian-language TV is very popular because it employs the best journalists; all the influential politicians and economists always find time in their packed schedules to watch Russian programs.⁴⁷ Commercials are also mainly in Russian.

⁴¹ See: A. Elebaeva, op. cit., p. 153.

⁴² See: *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki*, p. 118.

⁴³ According to the Kyrgyz Committee for Statistics, in 2004-2005 25 thousand Russians moved from Kyrgyzstan to Russia (see: G. Toralieva, "Russkie begut iz Kyrgyzstana. Ostalos men'she 500 tysiach," *Gazeta.kg*, 14 February, 2006, available at [www.gazeta.kg], 16 February, 2006).

⁴⁴ This status of the Russian language is limited to Kyrgyzstan and Belarus.

⁴⁵ See: Law on the State Language of the Kyrgyz Republic of 12 February, 2004, available at [http://www.eurasia-media.ru/law/kr_o_gos_yazyke.shtml], 7 March, 2007. Strangely enough, the Kyrgyz parliament used the Russian language to discuss this law intended to raise the role of the Kyrgyz tongue.

⁴⁶ See: "Soglashenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki i Pravitel'stvom Rossiiskoy Federatsii o poriadke rasprostraneniya program rossiiskikh teleradioveshchatel'nykh organizatsiy na territorii KR, ot 28 marta 1996 g.," in: *Kyrgyzstan i Rossia. Istoria vzaimootnosheniy suveremykh gosudarstv (90-e gg. XX v.)*, pp. 434-436.

⁴⁷ For details of journalism in Kyrgyzstan see, for example: A. Sukhov, "Pressa Iuzhnogo Kyrgyzstana: problemy zhurnalistskogo obrazovaniya," in: *Postsovetskie SMI. Ot propagandy k zhurnalistike*, Kavkazskiy institut SMI, Yerevan, 2005, pp. 128-138.

The Russian language dominates the sphere of secondary professional and higher education; in primary and secondary schools, the share of the Russian language is limited to 15 percent; in higher schools, about 67 percent of students prefer Russian as the language of study.⁴⁸ Urban dwellers prefer Russian-language schools for their children—in large cities demand is much higher than supply. The Boris Yeltsin Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University set up in 1993⁴⁹ is one of the best and most desirable higher educational establishments judging by the number of young people competing for places in it; about 1,000 Kyrgyz students obtain a higher education in Russia annually.⁵⁰

The situation in the media and education remains favorable for the Russian Federation; it seems that the larger part of the political elite will remain Russian-oriented to a greater or lesser extent. The Russian leaders may rest assured that no other cultural or linguistic environment will distract part of the local population—the Russian culture has much deeper roots.

So far Russia has no strategy for profiting from this; it is commonly believed that there is no need to bother and that Kyrgyzstan will remain tied to Russia forever. Other countries, however, might move in with more tempting measures.

Labor Migration

The Kyrgyz labor migrants in Russia, as well as labor migrants from other places, are mainly petty traders and workers. They sell their merchandise in Moscow, Ekaterinburg, and some of the other Volga and Siberian cities.⁵¹ They trade in Chinese textiles, fruit, and vegetables. In 2007, their chances were reduced to naught; this not only aroused doubts about the future of the newly introduced rules, but may also undermine Russia's prestige among the Central Asian workers and petty traders.⁵²

Bilateral relations between the two countries and their images are greatly affected by labor migration to the Russian Federation. The main markets of the Kyrgyz workforce copy the key features of Kyrgyz trade. No one knows how many Kyrgyz guest workers there are in Russia: the Ministry of the Interior supplied the figure of 25,000 with permanent addresses and 41,000 with temporary registration.⁵³ They have no bearing on reality: according to different sources, there are between 150,000 and 1 million Kyrgyz working in Russia.⁵⁴ The number of migrants in Russia increased when Kazakhstan (until that time a more attractive country) tightened the rules and deported a large number of Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens.⁵⁵

In January 2007, Russia, in turn, changed the registration rules for the foreign workforce and the possibility of illegal employment became greatly reduced. Theoretically, the rights of Kyrgyzstan

⁴⁸ This is a fairly stable trend; about 30 percent of students in higher educational establishments study in Kyrgyz (see: "Obrazovanie i nauka v Kyrgyzskoy Respublike," National Committee for Statistics of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek, 2003, p. 97).

⁴⁹ This provision is envisaged by Art 22 of the Agreement on the Principles of Interstate Relations between the Kyrgyz Republic and the R.S.F.S.R. of 21 June, 1991.

⁵⁰ See: *Rossiiskiy statisticheskiy ezhegodnik 2003*, State Committee of the Russian Federation for Statistics, 2003, p. 238. Over time, the number of students wishing to go to Russia will decrease. In 2001 about 300 students began studying in Turkey (see: A. Elebaeva, op. cit.).

⁵¹ Distribution of labor migrants is best illustrated by the maps of the flights from Kyrgyzstan.

⁵² For what Ayygul Ryskulova, head of the State Committee of the KR for Migration and Employment, has to say about the problems of labor migration and new rules for guest workers in Russia, see: IA 24.kg, 11 January, 2007. By the end of 2007, it will be clear how much the Kyrgyz traders lost because of the new rules.

⁵³ See: A. Elebaeva, "Labor Migration in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (27), 2004, p. 81.

⁵⁴ See: A. Elebaeva, "Migration in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: Nature, Trends, and Types"; *idem*, A. Elebaeva, "Labor Migration in Kyrgyzstan." According to a population poll, the permanent population of Kyrgyzstan is 4.8 million.

⁵⁵ Interview of the present author with "shuttle traders" who travel between Ekaterinburg, Astana, and Bishkek, July 2002.

citizens are protected by a set of interstate agreements.⁵⁶ In practice, however, they are not protected against the imperious Russian law and enforcers of order. On the other hand, the ordinary Russian citizens' stereotype about the Kyrgyz differ from that about Tajiks or Uzbeks. Over time, xenophobia and crimes against the Kyrgyz will greatly damage Russia's positive image in Kyrgyzstan.

Moscow may use the factor of labor migration and the threat of its limitation to put pressure on the Central Asian republics, and Kyrgyzstan in particular, even though this may misfire. This strategy may positively affect

- (1) the local population's ideas about Russia and
- (2) the degree to which Kyrgyzstan and the other Central Asian states become dependent on Russia.

This would promote its interests in the region better than the military bases.

Any Kyrgyzstan government should take into account the migrant issue for keeping social tension in check. The leaders should oppose Russia's efforts to limit migration, which will also limit the outflow of workforce to Russia. The phenomenon of labor migration can be described as an important factor of the two countries' relations.

C o n c l u s i o n

Throughout the post-Soviet period, Russia's presence and influence in Kyrgyzstan has remained stable. The country's economic dependence on Moscow and the local people's positive attitude toward Russia are two favorable factors from the viewpoint of the Russian Federation. From Kyrgyzstan's viewpoint, the RF is still the main sales market and the only "window to the West;" other powers have still to acquire all the positive factors that help Russia to keep the republic in its orbit.

Like the Central Asian countries, Russia proved unable to use these relative advantages. Expensive and allegedly important steps, as well as the support of expensive, even though important, projects are preferred to less impressive plans in labor migration, education, culture, etc.

After the March 2005 events, the new Kyrgyzstan leaders confirmed their pro-Russian orientation: they proved even more loyal than President Akaev and his multi-vector policy.

In the future too, Kyrgyzstan will have to reckon with the Russian factor, taking into account the Russian-speaking people, the fact that the local people treat the RF as "ours," and the hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz working in Russia to earn what their own government will not be able to ensure them for a long time to come.

Despite the above, Moscow should keep in mind that its advantages are temporary and that it cannot remain a lifebelt indefinitely. Other global and regional powers—China, the U.S., and Kazakhstan—are building up their influence in Central Asia.

⁵⁶ See: The Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic on the Legal Status of the Citizens of the Russian Federation Permanently Living on the Territory of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic Permanently Living on the Territory of the Russian Federation of 13 October, 1995, available at [http://www.businesspravo.ru/Docum/DocumShow_DocumID_35203.html], 12 July, 2004. The treaty did not come into force until 6 January, 2001.

RUSSIAN-TAJIK RELATIONS: PRESENT STATE AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

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Tajikistan is traditionally considered one of Russia's most devoted and stable geopolitical allies in the post-Soviet space. Nevertheless, there have been both warming up and cooling off periods in the history of Russian-Tajik relations, and they are fraught with a number of stumbling blocks, ulterior motives, and rather acute contradictions. So, a closer look reveals that the future of Russian-Tajik relations is not as surefire and problem-free as it may

appear, at least, in the long term. The main thing to be figured out is what are the predominating problems and trends today in the development of the relations between the two countries and how will they affect the future? Will Tajikistan remain an outpost of Russian foreign policy in the Central Asian region, or will it gradually distance itself from Russia, turning into an independent geopolitical player or satellite for other regional and world powers?

A View of Russian-Tajik Relations from Russia— From Democratic Idealism to the Triumph of Geopolitical Pragmatism

In 1991, after the Soviet Union collapsed and the former Soviet republics paraded their sovereignty, for some time, the Russian government regarded the events going on in Tajikistan as a struggle with the remnants of the communist past. Democrats, people from the Democratic Russia movement who had made their careers during the struggle with Gorbachev and suppression of the August coup of 1991, still predominated in President Yeltsin's close circle at that time. The Russian democrats in power openly lobbied the interests of the Tajik opposition, with the leaders of which they enjoyed close relations since as early as perestroika times. In so doing, most of them genuinely believed that new Russia's future lay in eradicating the old communist elites and establishing democratic conditions throughout the post-Soviet expanse. The group of so-called great power nationalists represented by professional government officials and employees of the national security and defense ministries were against this formulation of Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. As a result, Russia's policy toward Tajikistan was essentially paralyzed for several months, when the political leadership

(at least a significant part of it) lobbied the interests of the Tajik opposition, and the national security and defense employees, particularly at the local level (in the form of border guards and the 201st motorized rifle division), openly supported the pro-government People's Front.

The situation did not begin to change until the fall of 2002, when the viewpoint of the great power nationalists ultimately took the upper hand in the Russian leadership. In October of the same year, the Russian Federation moved toward open political and military support of the pro-government forces, which brought about the rapid defeat of the opposition by the beginning of 2003.

Since that time, Russia's foreign policy not only in Tajikistan, but also in the other CIS countries was formed under the influence and with the direct participation of the great power nationalists, whose viewpoint was distinguished by exclusive pragmatism. The emphasis was not placed on the ideology of a particular regime or post-Soviet leader, but on their geopolitical orientation and attitude toward the Russian Federation. In this respect, clearly communist and leftist movements, which did not hide their nostalgia for the united past and had a negative attitude toward both the Islamic world and Western civilization, ever frequently became the natural "allies" of Russia's foreign policy in the former Soviet republics.

Of course, the transition to "stark" pragmatism did not come about overnight, rather it took several years. During Yeltsin's time, the momentum of the past was still in effect, which was expressed in regarding the CIS states as a natural continuation, a kind of inheritance new Russia had acquired from the united Soviet and imperial past. Correspondingly, military-economic assistance and indulgences to the former Union fraternal states were still perceived for a relatively long time by both the giving and receiving sides as something that went without saying. It was only a few years later that the Russian leadership began making full use of the economic levers at their disposal to ensure the pro-Russian orientation of the post-Soviet power regimes.

But it was not until President Putin came to power that full priority was placed on pragmatism when determining Russia's geopolitical allies and adversaries. Today, as distinct from the past, pragmatism is essentially openly declared when defining the goals, interests, and priorities of Russia's foreign policy.

The same strictly pragmatic approach is used with respect to Tajikistan as it is with the other CIS countries: for the Russian Federation, it is important that Tajikistan, like the other Central Asian states, remains in the zone of Russia's influence. Russia finds it totally unacceptable that military bases of third countries, primarily those representing the Western bloc and NATO, are present in Tajikistan. In so doing, the Russian viewpoint is based not so much on political, as on economic considerations.

Today, one of Russia's key priorities is to link all the transport routes (including the shipment of energy resources) to the Russian Federation, as well as to prevent the opening of alternative routes that bypass Russian territory. The reasons for this are as follows.

- First, the Russian budget receives significant dividends for the transit of goods and freight from Central Asia to Europe and back. For Tajikistan, on the other hand, which is essentially in a geopolitical and transport impasse, Russian transit is in fact its only access to the Western markets: the bulk of Tajik import and export, primarily energy resource deliveries to the republic, passes through Russia. It goes without saying that if new transportation routes bypassing the Russian Federation do indeed open (such as the railroad branch that is planned from Tajikistan to Iran through Afghanistan), the Russian budget will be deprived of millions of dollars.¹

¹ See: M. Pirogovskiy, "Bol'shoye gazovoye ob'edinenie, Kaspiyskiy truboprovod dostalsia Rossii," available at [<http://www.globalrus.ru/comments/783920/>].

- Second, the Central Asian energy resource market has acquired a greater, even strategic, significance for Russia. At present, Russian energy companies, for example, Gazprom, deliver gas and oil to the West at high prices, and the shortage of energy sources on the domestic market is compensated for by purchasing cheaper energy resources in the Central Asian countries. If European consumers gain direct access to the Central Asian market, and local suppliers can raise the price of the energy resources delivered to Russia, the entire system, which had been developing for years and been extremely profitable for the Russian budget, would be destroyed. Moreover, if this happens, it will be much more difficult for the Russian Federation to fulfill its plans to become a world energy power that essentially has monopoly over the delivery of energy resources to the EU countries, that is, to solve the geopolitical task that currently forms the backbone of the country's strategic development.

Although Tajikistan is not a supplier state, it is, due to its geographic location, an important element in ensuring the sustainability of the above-mentioned system. The republic is a kind of “window” to Afghanistan, with further access through its territory to South Asia and the Middle East. There can be no doubt that the pro-Russian orientation of the Tajik government would do much to ensure that this “window” to Asia remains closed for as long as possible.

Of course, there are Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which also have opportunities to implement new transport alternatives—through Iran and Afghanistan. But the Iranian vector is totally unacceptable for Western companies and, in the long term, will not be used; this leaves Afghanistan, with which Tajikistan has the longest border.

The Tajik “window” can also be opened in the opposite direction. At this juncture, it should be kept in mind that most of the Tajik-Afghan border passes through rugged mountainous terrain with a complex relief. So, if the situation in Afghanistan destabilizes and a regime such as the Taliban comes to power, radical Islamic groups could pave themselves a way to Tajikistan and on to other countries in the region, thus threatening the viability of the local pro-Russian regimes and, correspondingly, the sustainability of energy resource deliveries to the Russian Federation.

Therefore, the ideal alternative for the Russian leadership would be to, first, have geopolitical partners in the form of their Tajik colleagues, who are sufficiently orientated toward Russia, in order to prevent the growing influence of other players on its territory, particularly of the U.S. and NATO. Second, to have a political regime that is sufficiently strong to control the situation in the country and sufficiently economically developed not to depend on direct subsidies from Moscow, but at the same time not stable enough to be able to conduct an independent foreign policy.

In this sense, it is much easier today for Russian political technologists and diplomats to ensure the long-term loyalty of the Uzbek regime. After the Andijan rebellion was crushed underfoot in 2005, Uzbekistan became an outlaw state, and as a result was deprived of the opportunity to maneuver between Russia and the West in its foreign policy. Pro-Russian moods are growing stronger in Kyrgyzstan, where there has been political instability for the second year running, and the government and opposition are vying with each other to make curtsies before Moscow in the hope of enlisting its support in the domestic political struggle.

Today, Tajikistan has a relatively good image in the eyes of the world community, the secular opposition has essentially been neutralized, and the only more or less influential opposition party—the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT)—is not seen as ally, keeping in mind the Islamophobia of the current Russian leadership. So Russian diplomacy has fewer and fewer levers in Tajikistan for putting pressure on the domestic political situation. Tajikistan's only Achilles' heel is the continuing mass labor migration to Russia. Without it, the Tajik economy will undergo an inevitable collapse—the total hard currency income into the country from labor migrants amounts to between one and two billion dollars every year, while the state budget does not top 500 million dollars.

In this respect, the Law on Migration adopted recently in the Russian Federation can very well be used in Russian foreign policy interests for putting pressure on countries, whose economy is kept afloat only due to labor migration. The thing is that this document envisages establishing quotas of the number of labor migrants for each main supplier state of workforce to the Russian labor market. As a result, Russian politicians acquired an excellent and entirely legal mechanism in the form of this legislative act for putting pressure on most of the CIS countries, and particularly on Tajikistan. Indeed, states that have chosen an “incorrect” orientation may have their quota cut back, since this is justified by the needs of the Russian market. For “correct” states, the quota may be increased, or at least a blind eye turned to the presence of a large number of foreigners in Russia.

All the same, labor migration is such a complex phenomenon that its use as a geopolitical truncheon could lead to unpredictable consequences, including in the sphere of future Tajik-Russian interrelations. The truth is that in a country with no strong opposition, it is often impossible to predict who will come to power in the event of new political upheavals and the extent to which the new leaders will be loyal to the Russian Federation.

In this way, the further development of Russian-Tajik relations requires new approaches and the use of new mechanisms of influence. The Russian Federation has been trying to solve these diplomatic tasks for the past few years. The main achievement in this direction is the following: today, Russia has come to the understanding that if it does not take into account the interests of the Tajik side, any strategy it develops for ensuring Tajikistan’s long-term pro-Russian orientation will be ineffective.

View from Tajikistan— Interests of a “Little Brother”

When the Russian leadership made the decision in 1991 to withdraw from the U.S.S.R., it followed a rather simple logic: there is no point in expending the Russian Federation’s resources, which are insufficient anyway, on raising the backward economies of other Soviet republics. On the contrary, all the available reserves are required for carrying out the Russian reforms, taking a leap forward, and returning both to the world arena and the post-Soviet expanse in a new way and with new strength. In so doing, the possibility of the former Soviet entities leaving the sphere of Russian influence was not taken seriously: first, reform of the Russian economy, as people confidently thought back then, should not take much time, and second, the economies of most of the Soviet republics were so closely tied to the metropolis that, it seemed, they simply had no other choice.

In the first decade after it acquired its independence, Tajikistan presented itself as a living example of a country that indeed had no choice. During the civil war, the economy was essentially in a state of collapse, the state’s territory was divided into zones of influence, and the ruling regime was still too weak, holding onto power mainly with the help of Russian military assistance and economic privileges. In this situation, the Tajik government carried out an essentially one-vector foreign policy, and Tajikistan was one of Russia’s main outposts in Central Asia. Suffice it to say that it was the only country in the region where Russia’s widespread military presence was preserved in full: the contingent of Russian border guards alone was estimated at around 17,000 servicemen in the mid-1990s. Of course, the Tajik authorities, being completely dependent on Russia’s assistance, did not talk openly of their interests, expressing them only in the form of requests and wishes, which the Russians could either meet or not meet, this having no effect on Russian-Tajik relations.

The situation began to change somewhat after the Peace Treaty was entered in June 1997, which put an end to the many years of civil war. The ensuing political stability promoted sustainable growth of the macroeconomic indices; the standard of living was raised slightly, and post-war restoration of the republic's destroyed infrastructure progressed at a rapid rate. The central government gradually put an end to the tyranny of the warlords, disarmed the units of the military opposition, and neutralized the political parties, which today are no longer able to communicate with the government on equal terms. The sustained stability made the country more attractive for foreign investments, and today their flow into the republic is detained only by the incompetent investment policy of the Tajik authorities, as well as by the high level of corruption in the local government apparatus. Tajikistan was chosen as one of the member states for the U.N. Millennium Development Goals program, which in the long term guarantees it access to privileged loans and investments from international donor organizations.

As a result, Tajikistan gained the opportunity to carry out an extended multi-vector foreign policy, sometimes deviating from the Russian vector to such an extent that this aroused Moscow's anxiety and irritation. Over time, Tajikistan began to state its interests with increasing adamancy during contacts with the Russian side.

The main interests of the Tajik side in foreign policy can be formulated as follows.

- First, the Tajikistan leadership was interested in attracting large investments into the energy and aluminum sectors as quickly as possible, which were called upon, as the Tajik state economists intended, to play the role of a driving force in the republic's economic development. The implementation of a mega project drawn up in the 1960s by the U.S.S.R. State Planning Committee to build a hydropower plant cascade on the Vakhsh River was endowed with special importance. The matter primarily concerns the completion of the largest Rogun hydropower plant.² The government's strategic task is essentially to turn Tajikistan into the same supplier of energy resources as neighboring Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, only electric power will be the raw material it supplies.³
- Second, ensuring security, both within the country and within the region, is important for the Tajik side. In this respect, the matter concerns not only and not so much security as a whole, as ensuring stability of the existing political regime and preserving the power distribution system that has currently developed.

The certain cooling off in Russian-Tajik relations during 2002-2003 was due to the growing dissatisfaction of the Tajik government regarding Russia's clear unwillingness to invest in the state's economy. Tajikistan was not so much in need of economic assistance as of real large investments. Since it did not receive them from the Russian Federation, the Tajik authorities began looking for financial sources beyond the CIS, which aroused Moscow's irritation.

In so doing, the Russian Federation remained the most preferable investor and strategic partner for the Tajikistan leadership. Both sides were tied by long years of partner relations, while the Tajik political elite has always been distinguished by pro-Russian sentiments. For the most part, it is much more convenient for the Central Asian leaders to cooperate with Russia than with Western countries and international donor organizations, which hinge the assistance they render on an entire slew of additional demands regarding human rights and the democratization of society. The Rus-

² The building of the largest hydropower plant in Central Asia began in 1976. The projected capacity of the Rogun hydropower plant amounts to 3,600 MW with an annual electric energy output of 13.1 billion kW/h. In 1992, the building of the hydropower plant was halted due to insufficient budget funds.

³ See: B. Jusupov, "Gidroenergetika Tadzjikistana: segodnia i zavtra," *Analitik.ru*, available at [<http://www.easttime.ru/analitic/1/10/172.htm>].

sian Federation, on the other hand, usually takes a more pragmatic approach, without placing any “inconvenient” demands on its partners, apart from the unvoiced, but easily performed, requirement to maintain loyalty.

However, the Tajik economy was in dire need of investments, and by the beginning of 2002, the republic’s government did not really care where they came from—from Russia, China, Iran, or the West. In this way, the Tajikistan leadership gradually moved toward the use of tough pragmatism in foreign policy by placing practical issues above ideological and historical elements or personal preferences.

Third Parties—Interests of Transnational Companies

In October 2004, an event occurred in the relations between the two countries that journalists and experts described as a “historical breakthrough” and Russia’s “triumphant” return to the region. Fifteen agreements were signed during Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit to Tajikistan. The most important for the Tajik side were agreements on investments in the republic’s economy of approximately 2 billion dollars (primarily in the energy industry and aluminum production). In response, the Tajik authorities consented to several significant concessions in military-strategic cooperation, thus taking steps toward meeting the desires of the Russian side. In particular, an agreement was entered about creating a permanent Russian military base in Tajikistan and transferring the Nurek opto-electronic center, which is of particular significance for the Russian army, to Russian ownership.

It seemed that the many years of efforts of the Tajik government were finally crowned with success, and the time would very soon come when the driving force of the local economy would work at full capacity, as was planned back in the Soviet period. All strata of Tajik society, from officials to members of the opposition and the mass media, experienced euphoria over the imminent opening up of new prospects, but soon several additional circumstances appeared that complicated implementation of the agreements reached.

- First, the agreements did not envisage direct participation of the Russian Federation’s official structures in the investment programs. Two of the largest representatives of Russian business assumed responsibility for implementing the Tajik mega projects—transnational companies Rusal and RAO UES of Russia. Moscow essentially acted only as a mediator between Russian business and the republic’s government. In practice, this meant there were no viable guarantees on the part of the Russian state—the Tajik leadership would now have to come to terms on the details of implementing the agreements directly with the heads of both companies. Correspondingly, if a consensus could not be reached during talks with investors, the contract would become invalid. On the other hand, an agreement on cooperation could prove to be far less advantageous to Tajikistan in its final form than it seemed at first glance.
- Second, it transpired that the Russian companies have their own interests, which they are naturally very keen to observe. Neither structure had any intentions of working at a loss, out of altruistic considerations. Consequently, they tried to invest as little as possible in the projects, while stipulating the maximum amount of profit.

Construction of the Rogun hydropower plant was only of interest to Rusal, one of the world’s largest aluminum companies, from the viewpoint of obtaining access to cheap electric power, which

would make it possible to increase smelting and lower net production costs. Correspondingly, the project was economically profitable for Rusal only if the company had full control over the entire aluminum manufacturing process—from extraction and delivery of the raw material by means of the toll system to Tajikistan, generation of electric power on the spot, as well as of the metal itself, to sale of the product on the world market. In order to do this, Rusal had to take control of TadAz (the Tajik aluminum plant), the main source of hard currency revenue into the republic's budget. In this case, TadAz and the Rogun hydropower plant (plus another aluminum plant which Rusal planned to build in the south of the country) were supposed to become part of an international aluminum production and sale system operating within the framework and under the full control of Rusal.⁴

As for RAO UES of Russia, the company regarded the building of the Sangtuda hydropower plant in Tajikistan only from the perspective of acquiring the most profit from subsequent sale of electric power abroad. Correspondingly, RAO UES planned to invest as little as possible in the project, trying in so doing to obtain at least some of the necessary finances from the Russian budget, which significantly prolonged implementation of the project. On the other hand, RAO UES insisted on increasing the pay-off period of the project (that is, the period during which the investor uses the enterprise's profit for covering his expenses).

It is not surprising that soon the talks on implementing the mega projects turned into exhausting bargaining between the customer (the republic's government) and the investors. As a result, the talks with Rusal did not lead to anything. The construction of the Rogun hydropower plant was halted before it had barely begun, and on 26 April, 2007, the Tajikistan authorities announced the cancellation of the billion-dollar transaction. To the displeasure of the Tajik officials, Rusal refused to modernize TadAz, which is located close to the Uzbek border. According to the Tajik government, the political pressure applied by Uzbekistan forced Rusal (and possibly the Russian political leadership as well) to curtail its plans regarding both the Rogun hydropower station and the aluminum plant.

At that time, the Tajikistan president stated that the country would finish building the Rogun hydropower plant using domestic resources. But at the same time, the republic's government is actively looking for new investors, this time beyond the CIS. In so doing, it was announced that any Russian company, apart from Rusal, could join the international consortium created to complete the Rogun project.

Talks with RAO UES were more successful, but the Tajik government had to concede to significant concessions, thus almost doubling the pay-off period of the Sangtuda hydropower plant. This in fact means that the country's budget would receive real dividends from the completed hydropower plant and the sale of the electric energy it generated (the first block is to be launched in December 2007) much later than the previously designated time.

Cooling Off Period

Today, observers note the advent of another cooling off period in the relations between the two states. The Tajik leadership is not pleased, to put it mildly, about the halt in construction of the Rogun hydropower plant and the entering into less beneficial agreements with RAO UES. It is very possible that some high-ranking Tajik officials are extremely irritated about the fact that during the talks in 2004, Russia achieved essentially all the concessions advantageous to it in the sphere of military-strategic partnership, while agreements on cooperation in the economic sphere, which are so important for Tajikistan, remain unimplemented for the most part.

⁴ See: D. Verkhovurov, "Tadzhikistan vprave trebovat' ot 'RusAl' bolshei otvetstvennosti," *Avesta.Tj*, available at [<http://sngnews.ru/archive/2005/09/25/>].

The Russian side, in turn, is unlikely to feel happy about the increased activity of Tajik diplomats and officials beyond the CIS. Recently, China,⁵ Iran, and India have been showing an interest in the republic's energy sector, and there is an active search for other foreign investors, both in the West and in the Near and Middle East countries. Iran has already assumed responsibility for and is successfully implementing the Sangtuda-2 HPP construction project. It is very possible that the PRC will soon enter an agreement to build two medium-capacity hydropower plants on the Zeravshan River.⁶

But it can be presumed that the Russian side is particularly displeased about the growing activity of the Tajik authorities with respect to Afghanistan. This includes the plans actively lobbied by Iran to open new transportation routes (for example, the building of a railroad branch and a power transmission line) from Tajikistan through Afghanistan to Iran and beyond. Pakistan says it is willing to invest 500 million dollars in building a 1,000-kilometer power transmission line from the Rogun hydropower plant being built in Tajikistan through Kabul to Peshawar.

Moreover, the plans to carry out joint Tajik-Afghan hydropower mega projects on the Panj border river, lobbied by the U.S., are unlikely to find understanding and support in Russia.

In this way, the multi-vector nature of Tajik diplomacy is gradually intensifying, largely by means of the Russian vector. But there is no need to talk in general about Tajikistan reorienting its foreign policy from Russia to third countries. The Russian vector remains the dominating one, and in the near future the situation is unlikely to dramatically change.

Further Prospects— Possible Alternatives

In the long run, three main development alternatives for Russian-Tajik relations can be forecast.

Alternative one—integration. Strengthening of the Russian vector in Tajikistan's foreign policy, right down to revival of a unilateral orientation or integration into a single state formation. Economic gain and dividends for both sides, whereby primarily for Tajikistan, are the prerequisites promoting this scenario. This presumes at least expansion of the existing and creation of new Russian investment projects in the republic.

Moscow's political and military-strategic influence is becoming increasingly dependent in present-day Tajikistan on the development of cooperation in the economy. The country's complex socioeconomic situation is increasingly forcing the Tajik officials to regard foreign policy issues through the prism of economic interests.⁷ Tajikistan could agree to integration with former Soviet fraternal states in the form of creating a united customs union or other association, membership in which would bring the Tajik treasury significant economic dividends. But the big question is whether the other CIS states, for example, Uzbekistan or Russia, will agree to reducing transit fees for transporting Tajik goods and freight through their territory.

This alternative also presupposes the arrival of big Russian business in Tajikistan. Today, the Russian government is unable to assume responsibility for implementing investment projects in the former Soviet Union, while large transnational Russian companies, which have significant financial resources and the ability to lobby their interests in the higher echelons of the Russian government, do

⁵ See: V. Panfilova, "V ozhidanii ekspansii," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 15 January, 2007, available at [http://www.ng.ru/cis/2007-01-15/6_expanison.html].

⁶ See: B. Jusupov, op. cit.

⁷ See: "Tadzhikistan: Chto vliiaet na otnosheniia s Rossiei?" *IWPR*, 4 April, 2007, available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1175669520>].

have this opportunity. At present, analysts are singling out seven or eight main “centers of influence” in big Russian politics—so-called nomenclature-political groups (NPG) or alliances (among them are Gazprom, Rosneft, the shareholders of Russia Bank, Federal State Unitary Enterprise Rosoboronek-sport, RAO Russian Railroads, and Basic Element company),⁸ which came to replace the financial-industrial groups defining Russian policy in the 1990s. In contrast to their predecessors, NPGs are distinguished by a high level of amalgamation with the government and, correspondingly, by a higher level of loyalty. Most likely, Russia’s foreign policy will be defined in the future not only by purely state interests, but also by the interests of Russian NPGs. Russian diplomats and NPGs are increasingly acting in tandem in the CIS countries, complementing and supporting each other. But if big Russian business does not have an interest in the economies of the CIS states, all the statements and plans for economic cooperation and integration will remain on paper.

Only those NPGs that specialize in the energy industry and the production of nonferrous metals are interested in Tajikistan. In the extremely monopolized Russian economy, there are very few such companies—primarily Rusal, whose relations with the Tajik leadership have become hopelessly spoiled, and RAO UES, which is already involved in the construction of Sangtuda-2. But the state of affairs in the Russian energy industry leaves much to be desired. All of RAO UES’s resources are currently being used to reform the industry. Since this kind of reorganization essentially fell through in the U.S. recently (the head of RAO UES Anatoly Chubais, who initiated the Russian reforms, referred to American experience), it is unlikely that RAO UES will have new opportunities in the near future to enlarge its presence in Tajikistan.

So there are few resources for building up Russia’s economic presence. Correspondingly, there is less likelihood of the pro-Russian vector in Tajik foreign policy becoming stronger.

Alternative two—confrontation. This presumes a relatively abrupt decrease in Russia’s influence in Tajikistan and reorientation of the latter’s foreign policy toward third countries. In the event such a scenario develops, the economic factor will also play a decisive role, presuming that a third country begins pumping large investments into branches of the economy that are strategic for Tajikistan. In this event, the Tajik leadership could quite easily agree to expand military-strategic cooperation with a third country, right down to opening a military base or entering geopolitical alliances and associations unfriendly to Russia (for example, GUAM).

Russia’s reaction to this development of the situation can be predicted based on the state of current Russian-Georgian or Russian-Moldovan relations. The only effective lever of pressure on the Tajik government is labor migration to Russia. By intercepting or even significantly reducing the flow of Tajik migrants, the Russian leadership could aggravate the sociopolitical situation in the republic to such an extent that the matter might go as far as survival of the regime. In this event, stakes might be placed on replacing the country’s government and promoting a more loyal candidate from among the ruling elite as leader.

But using such a powerful lever of pressure as labor migration could lead to unpredictable consequences. Today, there is no opposition party or movement in Tajikistan on which Russian political technologists can rely. Therefore socioeconomic destabilization could activate uncontrollable political processes and the advent to power of a party or movement with an extremely anti-Russian orientation.

Alternative three—evolution. Preserving the status quo with gradual strengthening of the multi-vector nature of Tajik foreign policy. On the one hand, this alternative presumes that cooperation between the two countries in military and strategic partnership will be preserved at the former high level. On the other, Tajikistan will relatively peacefully, without abrupt upheavals, and gradually withdraw from its unilateral orientation toward Russia.

⁸ See: E. Rudneva, “Kto vliiaet na Putina,” *Vedomosti*, No. 99 (1873), 1 June, 2007.

The evolutionary alternative is the most acceptable for both states with respect to observing mutual interests. The long-term results of the first and, especially, the second alternatives are difficult to predict from the point of view of economic and political risks.

So, as likely as not, the development of Russian-Tajik relations will ultimately progress according to the third alternative. Nevertheless, the aforesaid does not exclude the fact that difficulties will arise during implementation of this scenario. It is likely that periods of cooling off and misunderstanding will occur for both Russia and Tajikistan. In this event, much will depend on the ability of the leadership of both countries to steer clear of conflict.

CHANGES IN THE CONFIGURATION OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY PRESENCE IN TAJIKISTAN AND ITS INFLUENCE ON MAINTAINING SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Russia's military presence in present-day Tajikistan began at the end of the 19th century. The first border units were created in the Pamirs 110 years ago, after the Russian Empire conquered Central Asia in the second half of the 19th century.

During the Soviet period, more Soviet army contingents were deployed in Tajikistan. In 1945, the Gatchina 201st motorized rifle division was repositioned on the southern borders of the Soviet Union by a decision of the Union's supreme leadership. Later, it became part of a limited contingent of Soviet troops in Afghanistan and, after its withdrawal, was deployed once more at its former bases in Tajikistan. In addition to the 201st motorized rifle division, there were also combat

units and contingents of the U.S.S.R. Central Asian Border District stationed in the republic. And in 1979, construction began of the Nurek high-altitude opto-electronic center of the Space Monitoring System.

It goes without saying that during the Cold War, such an impressive concentration of military might on the Soviet Union's southern borders fulfilled at least two functions: defense—in the form of moral-psychological restraint of any radical intentions of certain states in the opposing bloc, and preventive-deterrent—permanent control and the possibility of launching a preventive strike in the southern and southwestern directions.

A large number of scientific, analytical, and other works have been written today about the

consequences of the U.S.S.R.'s collapse, so I will limit myself to saying that the disappearance of the Soviet Union dramatically changed the planet's geopolitical configuration. When the U.S.S.R. disappeared from the political map of the world and the Commonwealth of Independent States formed in its place, the global strategic significance of a large military contingent, now the Russian Federation's, in Tajikistan was reduced. Today the question of a possibly earlier change in the configuration of the Russian military presence in the republic, and more precisely, of the withdrawal of regular units of the RF army from it as early as the beginning of the 1990s, is purely hypothetical. History has already dictated its needs. The civil war in Tajikistan and the permanent domestic political instability in neighboring Afghanistan posed real threats to the security of the Central Asian region and the Russian Federation. The common interest of Tajikistan and Russia in ensuring stability and retaining security in the two countries (taking into account the domestic situation in each of them), just as throughout the entire region, was the main driving force behind comprehensive rapprochement between these countries, primarily in the military-political sphere. Russian-Tajik cooperation, which grew into a strategic partnership, was reinforced by a mutual agreement on the creation of Russian military base in Tajikistan; and in addition, a large Russian border contingent was stationed there.

Right up until the beginning of the NATO-led antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan, Russia was the only guarantor of external security for most of the Central Asian states. In turn, Russia's interest in the region's security had three main motivations: to fight international terrorism and religious extremism, to oppose drug trafficking, and to assist in ensuring the domestic stability of the Central Asian states. Generally speaking, Russia wanted stability and security in the region in order to turn this territory into the Russian Federation's rear and thus prevent it from being controlled by other nations, which would pose a strategic threat for Moscow.

A little less than ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in September 2001, the world

geopolitical map underwent significant changes once more. There can be no doubt that the beginning of the NATO-led antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan dealt a blow to Russia's strategic position in Central Asia. The United States' penetration into this region shattered the prevailing idea that the Russian Federation was the only power with the right to deploy its troops and have a military presence in this region. This encroachment by the U.S. on Russia's sphere of influence indicates the immense changes that have occurred in Moscow's geopolitical position. Despite the fact that Washington has not assumed precise obligations with respect to Central Asian security, the U.S.'s military presence in this region has essentially become a security alternative for the region's states. This, in turn, has decreased the role of Russia and the CSTO, its military lever in Central Asia, even more.

Against the background of the U.S.'s greater significance in the region, the Tajik-Russian strategic alliance, which became a strategic partnership, prompted Tajikistan's political leadership to reconsider Russia's presence and participation in the country's affairs. The Tajik government's adjusted attitude toward Russia's military presence in the republic was expressed in delaying the talks on the status and conditions for the existence of the Russian military base in Tajikistan—hitherto an invariable guarantee of security for both countries and the region, as well as in the accelerated transfer of control over the Tajik state border to the Tajik border troops.

There can be no doubt that due to the weak combat potential of the country's army, including the border troops, the decision to place protection of the state border under the control of the republic's forces aroused justified concern about how efficacious this protection would be and how well penetration of destructive groups (primarily into Central Asia) would be opposed. It also aroused fears that the volume of drugs being transported via the northern route through the region to Russia and Europe would increase.

What is more, the changes in configuration of Russia's military presence in Tajikistan should be viewed not only through the prism of ensuring Central Asia's security, but also in the

context of a geopolitical breakdown in the interests of the leading world players on the Central Asian arena, primarily Russia, the United States, and China (and to a lesser extent, the European Union).

The transformation that occurred in the structure of Russia's military presence in Tajikistan served as a new boost for discussing the

present-day realities of security in the Central Asian region, as well as Russia's role in Central Asia and in the global geopolitical picture. At the same time, it should be admitted that when carrying out this study, the author had to admit that, as of today, this discussion did not transpire into a full-fledged research study either by national, or Russian, or foreign experts.

Military Aspects of Mutual Relations between Tajikistan and Russia

As we noted, Russia's military presence in Tajikistan has a long and special history. Its military presence as such in Central Asia began in the mid-19th century, when the Russian Empire started encroaching on the region and adjoining one local state formation after another. The historical chroniclers recorded the presence of separate military corps of the Russian Empire in the eastern part of the Bukhara emirate (the central region of present-day Tajikistan), Gorny Badakhshan, and some uyezds of the Kokand khanate (north of Tajikistan). The military forces of His Imperial Highness were launched into action to carry out the foreign policy tasks of the Russian authorities in the southern (or Asian) direction. Of course, I am referring here to the well-known Big Game, the struggle between the Russian and British empires for influence in a particular region of Central Asia during the second half of the 19th century.

With the advent of Soviet power, contingents of the Red, and then Soviet, Army were called upon to play the role of a stabilizing and restraining force in the Central Asian region. (We have already mentioned the 201st motorized rifle division and the situation that arose in Tajikistan after the Soviet Union's Afghan campaign of 1979-1989 ended.)

When evaluating the overall dynamics of the development of military-political cooperation between the Russian Federation and Tajikistan, it should be noted that their mutual rapprochement was an objective necessity that answered the interests of both countries, primarily in ensuring and preserving security in the region. Tajik President Emamoli Rakhmon stated: "For several reasons, the Russian Federation occupies a special place in the domestic and foreign policy of Tajikistan."¹ This is understandable—thanks to Russia's military presence, Emamoli Rakhmon has succeeded in stabilizing the situation in the republic and reinforcing his position in the country. The president's former press secretary, Z. Saidov, specified the Russian Federation's indubitable role in stabilizing the situation in Tajikistan: "It was Russia that took on the main responsibility, during the armed confrontation between the government forces and opposition contingents, for keeping the scale of the combat action to a minimum and for supporting the Group of Russian Border Troops in Tajikistan in protecting the Tajik-Afghan border."²

¹ E. Rakhmonov, *Nasha tsel—natsionalnoye edinstvo*, Dushanbe, 1997, p. 72.

² A. Saburov, Z. Saidov, *Tadzhikistan: vneshniaia politika i massovaia informatsiia (1993-1995)*, Sharki ozod, Dushanbe, 1997, p. 8.

In the geopolitical respect, Russia's special role in regulating the inter-Tajik conflict, in assisting the subsequent post-conflict rehabilitation, and in monitoring the execution of the General Agreement also ensured the Russian Federation a unique position among the undeniable foreign policy priorities of war-devastated Tajikistan. Tajikistan became part of Moscow's permanent sphere of interests and influence in the Central Asian vector of its foreign policy strategy.

Transformation of Russia's Military Contingent in Tajikistan into a Military Base. Its Role in Ensuring Security in the Central Asian Region

The reorganization of Russia's military contingent in Tajikistan into a full-fledged legally registered Russian military base took more than five years. There was a number of reasons for the delay in opening this facility and essentially legalizing the de facto existence of Russia's military presence in Tajikistan, just as there was a number of prerequisites for deciding to transform the 201st motorized rifle division into a military base.

A closer look at registration of the Russian military base in Tajikistan reveals a certain amount of ambiguity in the action of the sides during the last years of preparation for opening this facility. Bilateral talks on the issue passed through different phases, from controversy to active steps toward each other. On the whole, the process by which terms were reached on the status and conditions for the existence of a Russian military base in Tajikistan can be described as a military-economic tender, or to use the simpler language of arithmetical equations—investments in exchange for the base.

Despite the opinion of many experts that the Tajik leadership is ready to go to any lengths to establish close cooperation with the United States, this argument does not entirely correlate to the actual state of affairs. Opinions were expressed that Vladimir Putin's visit to Tajikistan in October 2004 and the documents signed as a result were merely Moscow's diplomatic achievement, and in no way geopolitical victory, and that the steps Emamoli Rakhmon took toward the Kremlin were more tactical concessions dictated by domestic policy than a strategic choice in favor of Russia. Today it is obvious that the results of the military-economic bargaining that took place between Tajikistan and Russia, in which the Tajik authorities skillfully used American assistance as an effective lever of pressure on the Russian leadership, were mutually acceptable and satisfactory to both sides.

The sides did not dispute the role of the military base in ensuring stability in the region, neither the Russian leadership, nor the Tajik authorities had any serious intentions of withdrawing Russia's 201st motorized rifle division from the republic. The Russian military base, being a land component of Russia's military presence in Central Asia, is capable of securing the southern region of the Commonwealth from terrorist and extremist attacks. The sides are unanimous about the fact that the presence of the Russian military contingent in the country meets the interests of both countries and is maintaining stability in Central Asia as a whole. In addition to this, Russia's military base in Tajikistan now has something to defend (in addition to carrying out the main tasks of mil-

itary security), and that is, energy and industrial facilities, in which there are plans to invest more than 1 billion dollars in the near future. The Russian Federation has reinforced its own position in the region slightly by legalizing the presence of the Russian contingent in Tajikistan. Dushanbe has already acquired Moscow's full support of its regime, as well as real (not potential) investments into the country's economy.

The Tajik leadership's particular affinity for its new Western partners can be seen if special attention is paid to the current domestic political mosaic of Tajikistan's neighbors. The shift in power that took place in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Andijan events in Uzbekistan cannot help but have an effect on Tajikistan's attitude toward the West, the democratic reform support programs, and other Western values and attributes. Tajikistan is still the only country in Central Asia where there are no serious limitations on the activity of international nongovernmental organizations. It is obvious that Tajikistan's political leadership will be closely following the development of events in neighboring Uzbekistan. Depending on the consequences of the domestic trends, the Tajikistan authorities will possibly reconsider their attitude toward the widespread and in-depth activity of different international nongovernmental structures.

Withdrawal of Russia's Border Troops from Tajikistan. Changing the Configuration of Military Forces and its Influence on the Prospects for Security in the Central Asian Region

The agreement on transferring protection of the Tajik state border with Afghanistan under the complete jurisdiction of the Tajik defense and law-enforcement structures is the most dubious and ambiguous item, with respect to Central Asia's security, in the entire bloc of military issues regulated between Russia and Tajikistan. As we noted, in light of the relative weakness of the technical and personnel potential of Tajikistan's border structures, the threat of an increase in drug, firearms, and ammunitions trafficking and the easier penetration of various kinds of destructive elements from neighboring Afghanistan could have the most negative consequences for security in the republic and in Central Asia as a whole. How justified is the Tajik authorities' decision to take protection of the state border under their control? What influence could the shuffling of military forces in Tajikistan have on security in the country and the region?

From the very beginning of the negotiation process, the prospect of losing relative control over the drug flows from Afghanistan to the Russian Federation could not help but worry the Russian side. Russia has repeatedly stated that its border presence in Tajikistan is seen as a guarantee of its own and regional security. Now the group of Russian border guards is remaining in the republic as military advisors. The Provision on the Operational Border Group of the Russian FSS defines the functions of this formation, which include, assisting the Tajik border troops to protect the state border; coordinating action to protect the Tajik state border with authorized bodies of Tajikistan; studying the state of its integrity; exchanging information with the Committee for Protection of the State Border (CPSB)

of Tajikistan on issues of mutual interest; drawing up proposals for protecting the Tajik state border; helping to organize and render material and technical support of authorized Russian and Tajik structures; and participating in the organization and carrying out of joint measures for protecting the state border of Tajikistan.³

In the Russian Federation and beyond it, different opinions were expressed about the consequences of transferring the Tajik-Afghan border to Tajikistan's control. In May 2004, First Deputy Head of the Russian Foreign Ministry V. Trubnikov described the withdrawal of Russian border guards in no uncertain terms: "We are withdrawing from Tajikistan and in so doing denuding the border, and this means that drugs will have free reign."⁴ According to the evaluations of various experts, the withdrawal of the Russian border guards from the Tajik-Afghan border would essentially mean opening it up and could become the reason for new destabilization of the situation in Tajikistan and Central Asia. Various expert assessments confirmed that neither Tajikistan, nor Russia, nor the world community would benefit from the withdrawal of the Russian border troops from the Tajikistan border, and it may even be dangerous for them.⁵ There are more than 150,000 drug addicts in Moscow alone, and so it would be much easier to close the main channel of drug trafficking in Tajikistan than look for large batches of heroin in Russia later.

The analytical report of the Center for Strategic Forecasting published in June 2004 said that the withdrawal of the Russian military contingent that helped to fight drug trafficking could lead to an extremely unfavorable situation on the border, which neither the Tajik border guards, nor even the American soldiers would be able to control.⁶ The assessment given in the U.S. State Department's 2005 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report deserves special attention. It says in particular that "the withdrawal of Russian border troops by the end of 2005 may negatively impact Tajik drug interdiction efforts."⁷ The possibilities of the Tajik leadership were also assessed: "...The Tajik Government's resources for counternarcotics efforts remain limited, however, and the Government itself is vulnerable to pressure from prominent traffickers, many of whom are in a position to threaten domestic stability if seriously challenged."⁸

At the same time, some high-ranking employees in Russia's defense and law-enforcement structures do not share the opinion that the flow of drugs to Russia will increase and do not see a big tragedy in yielding control of the border to Tajikistan, particularly since drugs from Afghanistan have been coming and continue to come to Russia not only through Tajikistan, but also via other republics of Central Asia. In this respect, the need for reinforcing Russia's own borders was emphasized.⁹

Head of the Russian FSS Border Service V. Pronichev believes the border should not have two landlords. He also talked about implementing measures for installing technical equipment on the common border with Kazakhstan, which has essentially been missing in the past.¹⁰ V. Pronichev's deputy, A. Manilov, also pointed out how capital- and labor-intensive it is to install technical equipment on

³ See: *Provision on the Operational Border Group of the Russian Federal Security Service in Tajikistan—Appendix to the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan on Cooperation on Border Issues of 16 October, 2004.*

⁴ M. Gavriushin, "Uiti nel'zia ostat'sia," *Rossiiskoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 7, 21 July, 2004, available at [http://military.rian.ru/articleprintversion.html?art_id=25410].

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ See: M. Gavriushin, *op. cit.*

⁷ *Excerpts: International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2005*, Published by the U.S. State Department in March 2005, available at [<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=March&x=20050309200420xIrenneF0.4634363>].

⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁹ See: V. Kulikov, "Pamirskie tainy," available at [<http://www.rg.ru/2004/11/17/granica.html>].

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

the border with Kazakhstan. He claimed that a control system could certainly be installed with the help of technical means on the border with Afghanistan, but, in his words, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were not actively cooperating with the Russian border structure, as a result of which hardly anything is known about the situation on the external borders of these states.¹¹

Tajik experts were asked the same question about how capable the Tajik border and other law-enforcement structures were of coping with the responsibility assumed, and the extent to which the statements about the country's willingness to protect the state border were realistic.

According to the information of competent sources, the situation in the border regions with Afghanistan has not improved, either with respect to material and technical support of the contingents of Tajik border guards, or with respect to maintaining security on the borders at the level of previous years.

Economic stratification is gradually intensifying, both among the residents of the border areas and among the personnel of the border troops on the state border with Afghanistan. Small retail trade networks and service outlets used to provide the poorest population of the border areas with more or less stable earnings, which was enough to at least feed itself. The high salaries by local standards of the soldiers of Russian border troops were an economic prerequisite for the functioning of the micro economy in the border areas and provided the main income in the families of border guards among Tajik citizens. Now, however, it is extremely likely that there will be more evidence of residents in the border areas becoming more involved in drug trafficking. This is already happening in the Moscow and Panj directions (the most popular narcotics transit routes), where in recent years the "complicity base" index has invariably increased. When Tajik citizens employed in the Russian border troops were recruited to serve in the Tajik border forces, they were told that former contract soldiers would receive a fringe benefit of \$100, which was in no way justified.¹²

The number of Tajik citizens kidnapped during attacks from the Afghan side as ransom for the payment of drug trafficking debts has increased in the Badakhshan area. In this sense, the example of the Kalaikhumb section is indicative: the border is poorly protected, the CPSB does not have enough funds to install the necessary equipment, and most of the food supplies and some other material means were sold illegally in order to receive profit before the end of the winter period.¹³ In this respect, it is worth presenting an excerpt from an interview by the CPSB chairman on the results of the 2004-2005 winter in the Badakhshan area: "And, to be frank, it was frequently a question of survival and making it through the winter."¹⁴

The task force activity of the CPSB contingents in the Badakhshan area is relatively perfunctory. Border posts provide their own protection, and detachments are sent to the border irregularly. Fuel and lubricants, money, food, and commodities are often demanded of local citizens at the border checkpoints. This is arousing a negative reaction among the population of the border areas of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region and threatening to provoke conflict situations on the border and in the regions where CPSB contingents are deployed.¹⁵

In addition to this, there is information that in some border areas, envoys from Afghanistan are already busy recruiting Tajik citizens—former border guards who are now unemployed.¹⁶ It is impos-

¹¹ See: V. Kulikov, *op. cit.*

¹² Interview with source wishing to remain anonymous.

¹³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁴ Interview by CPBS Chairman S. Zukhurov to Information Agency Azia-Plus, "Narkotrafik ne vozrastiot," 17 March, 2005.

¹⁵ Interview with a source wishing to remain anonymous.

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

sible to say for sure what these people are being recruited for, but it should be emphasized that those who have Russian citizenship (and, consequently, a Russian passport) are the main targets, there being approximately 10,000 such people in the Gorno-Badashkhan Autonomous Region alone. As we know, if a person has a Russian passport he can move freely throughout the territory of several Commonwealth states (apart from Russia itself). In this sense, such mobile people can be used to great advantage, both in legal and in illegal activity.

As of the end of April 2005, the number of narcotics confiscated by the Russian border guards in the Moscow and Panj vectors amounted to approximately 300 kg, almost half of which was heroin.¹⁷ From the beginning of 2005, CPSB contingents confiscated 193 kg of narcotics.¹⁸ What is more, according to the information of Chief of Staff of the Narcotics Control Agency (NCA) of Tajikistan U. Toshmatov, recently an increase has been noted in the volume of drug transit from Afghanistan. In the first quarter of 2005, NCA employees intercepted 34 attempts at illicit drugs circulation and confiscated more than 200 kg of narcotics (2.3-fold more than in 2004). In addition, since the beginning of 2005, in the border Afghan provinces of Kunduz (across from the section of the Panj border contingent), Takhor (across from the section of the Moscow border contingent), and Badakhshan (across from the Pamirs), additional laboratories are being set up for processing heroin.

Specialists (and I mean specialists, and not officials) from the border structures of both the Russian and the Tajik sides are unanimous in their opinion that transferring the Tajik-Afghan section of the state border under the control of the Tajik Committee for Protection of the State Border was premature. The question of transferring the border under the control of the Tajik side was not disputed; however, there was always disagreement about the deadlines and conditions of the procedure. It is commonly believed that the process should have been carried out gradually, slowly replacing the border patrols under the jurisdiction of the Russian servicemen with Tajik border guards. The transfer of the real and personal property of the border posts to the Tajik colleagues did not do much to preserve the existing infrastructure; on the contrary, with respect to logistics support, the Tajik servicemen have to begin from the mid-1990s level. The objective shortcomings and weak technical, material, as well as personnel potential of the Tajik border troops cannot help but have an effect on how well the state border is protected, how efficiently drug trafficking is controlled, and how well the penetration of various kinds of destructive elements both into Tajikistan and into the region as a whole is prevented.

The NATO armed contingent in Afghanistan, which is mainly busy ensuring its own safety, does not have much influence on the cultivation, processing and sale of narcotics. As we know, since formation of the new Afghan government, Great Britain has taken on the responsibility for narcotics control in Afghanistan. The British placed their stakes on two vectors—training local national security employees in ways to fight illicit drug circulation and developing alternative farming. But today, it has to be admitted that their efforts have been a complete fiasco.

It should also be kept in mind that representatives of the Northern Alliance found themselves essentially detached from power on Afghanistan's domestic political arena. This Alliance, despite its friendly attitude toward Tajikistan and Russia, is a traditional supplier of heroin via the northern route through Central Asia to the Russian Federation and Europe. It stands to reason that in order to reinforce its position and try to restore its previous power niches, the Alliance leaders are trying to build up their military power, apparently by increasing heroin deliveries. As early as 2004, in Alliance-

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ See: L. Kenjaeva, "S. Zukhurov: 'My v sostoianii okhraniat' rubezhi gosudarstva!'" *Azia-Plus*, No. 21(279), 26 May, 2005.

controlled Badakhshan, a significant increase in land for growing opium poppy was seen. Taking into account the dramatically increased areas of drug cultivation in the northern provinces of Afghanistan and the transfer of control over the protection of the Tajik-Afghan border to the national armed forces of Tajikistan, Russia and Europe are justifiably concerned about the prospect of an increase in narcotics transit through Central Asia to corresponding terminals.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

After the beginning of the NATO-led antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan and the changes in configuration of Russia's military presence in the region, the situation in most Central Asian states looks rather complicated from the viewpoint of ensuring security and stability in these countries.

The overall development of the sociopolitical situation in Central Asia is defined not so much by the presence of foreign troops in its states, as by the weaker role of the *Afghan factor* in the political decision-making system in the region's countries. The leaders and the elite used to place the priority on preventing various Afghan groups from influencing the domestic political situation using force. This particularly applies to the decision-making procedure in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and partially in Kyrgyzstan. The power-related requirements of corresponding states and the foreign relations system were made part of this task. At the same time, the following should be noted: *the Afghan factor* revealed the fact that the main threat to the security of the Central Asian countries came and comes not so much from the outside, as from within.

The existence of the *Afghan factor* stimulated the need for an outside guarantor of security. Russia provided this guarantee for a long time, although in reality it could not perform the functions of a universal power-related and sociopolitical stabilizer. Russia's military presence in the region, particularly the large group of troops in Tajikistan, was called upon to morally and psychologically deter possible invasions into Afghanistan. The destructive groups of the latter were forced to proceed from the relative indefiniteness of a potential Russian response to their harsh actions, for example, the beginning of widespread penetration into the territory of Tajikistan. To what extent could the Russian Federation carry out operations in Tajikistan using force? Tajikistan's importance was defined by the fact that it was the central point in the regional *domino system* for a certain time, and, most important, it was the key to the ultimate defeat of the Northern Alliance, without which the Taliban movement could not count on solving its future political and power-related tasks.

But a military-political guarantee system on the part of Russia under relatively virtual conditions did not provide a sufficient basis for the existing regimes in Central Asia to survive, particularly considering the fact that the policy of the new Russian leadership aimed at reinforcing Russia's position as the main military-political partner of the Central Asian countries was essentially not reinforced by any significant economic enlargement of Russian capital. In this sense, the appearance of new foreign forces (primarily the NATO states) as unofficial guarantors of security in the countries in question was perceived with traditional Central Asian hospitality, particularly since Russia had earlier broke the taboo on internationalization of security issues in the region and transferred (although theoretically) the resolution of a whole series of vital problems to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

After this, the Russian Federation was forced to play, at most, an equal role with the PRC, while more likely act as a junior partner for Beijing, which possessed incomparably greater and qualitative-

ly broader levers of influence on the situation in Central Asia as a whole, as well as in the individual republics of the region. All the more so since, in contrast to Moscow, which designated the priority of the western vector in its foreign policy, the enlargement of Beijing's presence in Central Asia, precisely at the end of the 1990s, became a significant state priority. In this way, it was unrealistic to count on Central Asia remaining in the sphere of Russia's exclusive influence, even before the question was raised of the West's enlarged presence in Central Asia in light of the antiterrorist campaign in Afghanistan.

Today, it is becoming obvious that the leaders of the Central Asian countries are not perceiving the American and Western presence as a whole in their states as a factor of military stabilization. The matter more likely concerns the fact that a new financial and political resource has appeared for the local elites, which has significantly expanded the possibilities of political maneuver. Judging from how the conditions of the existence of foreign military contingents in the Central Asian countries were discussed, our elites did not count on the Western states, at least in latent form, assuming responsibility for ensuring security and, particularly, domestic stability in these countries. At the same time, it should be noted that the political elites of several Central Asian states, particularly the leadership of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, maintained rather active contacts with Western politicians regarding the patronage of certain countries in building the new statehood. However, these relations did not lead to any serious breakthrough in state-building. On the contrary, they gave rise to serious problems for the ruling elites due to the appearance of political groups in the Central Asian countries that were democratic in form and pro-Western in essence. This cast aspersions on the legality of the existence of authoritarian regimes. At present, the relatively more stable regimes of the Central Asian republics (Turkmenistan and Tajikistan) are much less inclined to agree with the appearance of politically alternative groups, particularly those enjoying the West's patronage and receiving its political and economic support to one extent or another.

It is obvious that the main goals of the Central Asian regimes' political game involving the foreign military presence related to the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan were to obtain an additional lever of pressure on Russia, as well as form a new source of extra-budgetary income. To a certain extent, Tajikistan's political leadership succeeded in making use of this lever and was able to bargain certain political and economic advantages from the Russian Federation. Confirmation of this are the legally registered contracts and agreements between Russia and Tajikistan on an entire series of economic and military-political issues.

In this situation, a specific context is formed: the ruling elites in the countries in question are not interested in Russia's withdrawal from the region, for the Russian political and military presence makes it possible to avoid discussing with the West such problems as the election system, human rights, and the fight against corruption, particularly at a time when some states are about to enter the difficult period of a power transfer to the younger political generation. The Central Asian leaders will still need Russia for a long time to come as a real counterbalance to the West.

There can be no doubt that the destruction by America and its allied troops of most of the infrastructure of the Taliban movement and al-Qa'eda network in Afghanistan has significantly changed the military-political picture in the region. We can primarily say that the *Afghan factor*—as the prevailing basis for political and military planning—has ceased to exist. At present, the Central Asian countries do not consider that the situation in Afghanistan will rapidly destabilize and spread beyond the boundaries of the country. The process is perceived as relatively flaccid, in which military-political tension and religious, as well as ethnic, contradictions will be played out within the framework of the inter-clan struggle, which is traditional for Afghanistan. This neutralizes the possibility of an external upsurge even of those forces that might be inclined to pose the most serious tasks. In this sense, it should be admitted that the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan

had a significant stabilizing effect on the region and excluded the likelihood of a major conflict emerging.

At the same time, several opinions should be expressed.

- First, potential threats to Central Asian security, directly or indirectly related to Afghanistan, essentially boil down today to the possible increase in narcotics deliveries from this country and the penetration of small bands of various destructive groups into the region. In the first case, the danger of increasing drug transit, in light of transferring the Tajik-Afghan border under the control of the national border forces of Tajikistan, is more global in scope, which was discussed in the previous section of the study. Second, it is entirely clear that the small bands mentioned are ultimately headed for the Ferghana Valley, which is arousing the concern of the states in question.
- Second, alleviating the influence of the external Afghan factor of instability on the situation in the Central Asian countries brought to the foreground those in which internal contradictions are most manifest, that is, where the building of the new state systems is progressing with significant defects or has not been completed. In this respect, it is entirely natural that Kyrgyzstan was the country in which serious political instability was designated after neutralization of the Taliban and most of the radical Afghan groups. In this state, building of the power system was extremely inconsistent, which aggravated the traditionally existing contradictions between the southern and northern clans. In addition, the leadership of this republic was distinguished by significant maneuvering in the choice of the system of foreign guarantees. Akaev's desire to uphold, as much as possible under the region's conditions, the U.S.'s demands on democratic states, went hand in hand with the attempts to draw Russia into implementing stabilizing measures not only in the power-related, but also in the political sphere. For example, the question of the Russian language as the second state language did not have and could not have any consequences for power-related relations, but it significantly stabilized social relations. In the final analysis, in Kyrgyzstan, where domestic contradictions were regarded as less aggravated compared with Uzbekistan, events developed in a more negative vein, although it is still too early to say that Kyrgyzstan can become a central point in the *domino system* in Central Asia.
- Third, the appearance of new sources of financing and the decrease in urgency of the external force threat are leading to very ambiguous results with respect to the development of the domestic political situation in several countries of Central Asia. On the one hand, polarization is occurring in the region's states between those in the elite who have access to distribution of unplanned revenue from the foreign military presence, and those who are removed from this. This in itself cannot pose a direct threat to the stability of the existing regimes, but under certain conditions, by way of self-identification of those who found themselves outside the new system, the regional or religious factor could be chosen. On the other hand, it is obvious that the degree of consolidation of the elite in the face of a common enemy has significantly declined, and this could have very specific consequences in the form of aggravating the inter-clan struggle within the ruling stratum of "the chosen." The events in Kyrgyzstan, which cannot fully be classified as examples of such conflicts, nevertheless demonstrate a model of the possible development of the situation in the event that significant and influential segments of the elite continue to be deprived of direct levers of political and economic power.

The main conclusion to be drawn on the basis of an analysis of the current situation is that instability in the Central Asian countries and in the region as a whole has not been eliminated by the

American-led operation in Afghanistan, or as a result of the change in configuration of Russia's military presence there. On the contrary, in the mid term, conditions have been designated for restoring the political standoff in the context of state-building, and to be more precise, completing the formation of the independent states of Central Asia. There is a feeling in the region's political circles that those forces now curbing completion of the state-building process, as well as the integration of the U.S. and several Western countries into the system of relations developing in the states in question, will form the political elite in the post-transition period.

REGIONAL SECURITY

**TERRITORY,
POPULATION, ETHNOSES,
AND SECURITIZATION:
ON THE ENDOGENOUS FACTORS OF
SECURITY IN THE REGIONAL SYSTEMS OF
THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

This is an attempt to assess the endogenous security factors of the regional political systems of the Caucasus and Central Asia in order to find out, in particular, how the region's territorial-demographic and ethnic factors affect the basic perceptions of security, as well as the securitization¹ processes occurring in this context. I

¹ The securitization phenomenon originally interpreted as a process of comprehension by society/the state of cer-

tain phenomena as an existential security threat was theoretically substantiated by the Copenhagen School. For more detail, see: B. Buzan, O. Weaver, J. De Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, Rienner Publishers Boulder, London, 1998; O. Weaver, B. Buzan, M. Kelstrup, P. Lemaitre, *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, Pinter, London, 1993, and also B. Buzan, O. Weaver, *Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, etc.

tend to investigate. At the same time, the specifics of the territorial, demographic, and ethnic structures, especially in the regions in which “modern states”² predominate (Central Asia and the Caucasus belong precisely to this category), directly affect the perceptions of the threats and vulnerabilities created by the foreign political environment and domestic sub-national groups. This approach might clarify the reasons for the post-Soviet conflict dynamics in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

This assessment is based on certain specific conceptual-categorical provisions calling for preliminary explanation. First, this article looks at the regional political systems of the Caucasus and Central Asia as Regional Security Complex-

² By way of assessment of the states’ sociopolitical development, B. Buzan and O. Weaver have identified three types (levels): pre-modern states (with a very low level of internal sociopolitical cohesion and state organization; weak government control over the territory and population); modern states (strong government control over society, limited openness, sanctity of sovereignty and independence and related attributes, including territory and borders, and stakes placed on self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and national identity), and post-modern states (relatively moderate treatment of the sovereignty, independence, and national identity issues, openness in economic, political, and cultural contacts with the outside world) (for more detail, see: B. Buzan, O. Weaver, op. cit., pp. 22-24).

es (RSC).³ Second, I do not intend to operate using the fairly limited traditional spatial political division of the Caucasus into two segments—the Northern and the Southern Caucasus. I am proceeding from a relatively recent, yet much more adequate structure (the Northern, Central, and Southern Caucasus) better suited to objectively reflect the region’s most important geopolitical and ethnocultural specifics.⁴

³ B. Buzan’s model of the regional security complex is based on the interdependence of the national security interests of a geographically close group of states. The original interpretation speaks of RSC as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another” (B. Buzan, *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, Second edition, Lynne Rienner Publishers Boulder, Colorado, 1991, p. 190).

⁴ This conception divided the Caucasus into three parts: the Northern (the autonomous entities of the Southern Federal District of the Russian Federation); the Central (the independent republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia) and the Southern (the Northeastern parts of Turkey, or the Southwestern Caucasus, and Northwestern parts of Iran, or Southeastern Caucasus) (see: E. Ismailov, Z. Kengerli, “The Caucasus in the Globalizing World: A New Integration Model,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (20), 2003; E. Ismailov, V. Papava, *The Central Caucasus: Essays on Geopolitical Economy*, CA&CC Press® AB, Stockholm, 2006).

The States, Borders, and Formation of the Basic Security Perceptions within the Caucasian and Central Asian RSC

The processes that led to the security perceptions at the national level in the RSC were very different, mainly because they required different periods of time to come to fruition, which could not but affect the stability of the perceptions themselves. The autonomous regional political systems took shape during different historical periods divided by a fairly wide time gap.

The RSC in the Caucasus is not a post-Soviet reality to be described as an aftermath of the Soviet Union’s disintegration: it was an earlier structure, the dynamics of the relations of which were revived in the post-Soviet period.⁵ The basic interdependence vectors in the security sphere and the

⁵ See also: B. Coppieters, “Conclusions: The Caucasus as a Security Complex,” in: *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, Ed. by B. Coppieters, Brussels, Vubpress, 1996, pp. 194-195; S.E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers. A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, Curzon Press, 2001, p. 24.

corresponding dynamics of relations appeared in the pre-Soviet period; the total Soviet control that took shape in the 1920s merely “conserved” them; B. Buzan describes this as “overlay.”⁶

The security relations system in Central Asia is post-Soviet realia; the difference between the two regions is easily explained by the different periods of statehood formation in the Caucasus and Central Asia. In the former, the national states came into being in the first quarter of the 20th century, after the Bolshevik revolution and disintegration of the Russian Empire (the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-1920; the Georgian Democratic Republic of 1918-1921, and the Armenian (Ararat) Republic of 1918-1920).⁷ In Central Asia, on the other hand, the national republics proper are the product of Soviet power; they became sovereign states in the early 1990s, during the post-Soviet period. This means that in the Caucasian RSC, the endogenous security factors were first activated in the first third of the 20th century, which helped to create stable perceptual security constructions that were revived as soon as outward “overlay” disappeared and the Central Caucasian republics restored their independence in the 1990s.

The basic constructions of political relations of Central Caucasian states of the late 20th century (both among themselves and with the external actors) almost completely coincided with the constructions of the first independence period.

In the early 20th century, territorial issues were very much prominent in the three independent republics; Azerbaijan and Georgia managed to resolve their territorial disputes more or less promptly and painlessly, while their territorial disagreements with Armenia developed into an armed conflict. In fact, moderation and the desire to cooperate that Azerbaijan and Georgia demonstrated in their mutual relations during the first and the second independence periods offered a striking contrast to the fairly complicated relations with Armenia and its relative alienation.

The same applies to the nature of the perceptual constructions in the three republics as friendly/hostile toward other states. During both periods, Armenia demonstrated an obvious pro-Russian bias irrespective of who ruled Russia: be it Denikin’s Volunteer Army, or the Bolsheviks. Today this is the Russian Federation. In every case, Armenia tended to neglect the harm this bias might do to its independence. Azerbaijan and Georgia, on the other hand, placed their stakes on cooperation with Turkey and the West.

The five Central Asian republics acquired their official territories and institutions within the Soviet Union, which explains why the autonomous conceptualization of the security sphere at the national level could have occurred only in the post-Soviet period. This could not help to create stable perceptions of the threats and vulnerabilities conditioned by the regional geopolitical environment. The territory and the borders as the main objects of securitization of modern states could not develop in Central Asia into an active and determining security relations function. As distinct from the Caucasus, where the autonomous national-state formations have been settling the national territorial issue since the first third of the 20th century, with all the ensuing conflict potential, in Central Asia this function belonged to the Soviet Center.⁸

A mere glance at the political map reveals the striking differences of delimitation in the two regions. In the Caucasus, the land border meanders to form enclaves and exclaves, while the Central Asian borders are mainly lineal and very simple. This fully applies to the 2,203-km-long⁹ bor-

⁶ See: B. Buzan, op. cit., pp. 219-221.

⁷ It should be said that in the wake of the Russian Empire’s disintegration, several more republics appeared in the Caucasus, including the Gorskaia (Mountain) Republic in the north (1917-1919); the Southwestern Caucasian (Kars) Democratic Republic (1918-1919), and the Araz-Turkic Republic (1918-1919) in the southwest; the Republic of Azadistan (1920) and the Gilian Republic (1920-1921) in the southeast.

⁸ For more details about the Central Asian borders, see: S. Golunov, “The Post-Soviet Borders of Central Asia: Security and Cooperation,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (11), 2001, pp. 141-152.

⁹ See: *The CIA World Factbook 2006—Kazakhstan*, available at [<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kz.html>], 3 December, 2006.

der between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the 379-km-long¹⁰ border between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and the 1,621-km-long¹¹ border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This could have been explained by the terrain; however, it reveals the importance of the territories with different terrains and climates (or, rather, the possession of such territories) for securitization in the states concerned.

Securitization of the “Territorial Deficit” and the Conflict Level

The specific features of the Caucasian borders speak of the very high importance of the territories enclosed by them, and of the never-ending struggle for possession of the territories, as well as of the much higher securitization level of the geographic conditions and factors (geo-securitization) in the Caucasus compared with Central Asia. Modern states assess the territories from the point of view of their natural conditions conducive to material and economic development. This much is obvious and should not surprise anyone. In the Caucasus, where the nearly entire territory was highly favorable, attempts to enlarge the “Lebensraum” were frequent. In the periods when the region was controlled by outside forces, territorial rivalry went on at the social level, which logically and inevitably created a “historical insults” complex in the minds of the regional ethnoses, as well as the “lost lands” perception together with the threats and vulnerabilities related to potential occupation of their “historical lands.”

In Central Asia the situation was different: deserts, which occupy a large part of the region, could not be perceived as territories suitable for the local ethnoses’ material and economic development. The Ferghana Valley was the only area that could be regarded as such. Today it is divided among three Central Asian states—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In the late 1980s, it became the most dangerous seat of regional tension.

We can argue that the conflict level should be higher in regions with an obvious deficit of desirable territories. Anyone wishing to compare the dynamics of security relations in the Caucasian and Central Asian RSC from the viewpoint of this stimulating element will be forced to conclude that, under identical conditions, the negative dynamics in the Central Asian RSC generated by the endogenous territorial contradictions would have been more pronounced than in the Caucasus. Such an analysis, however, requires that other, and highly important, factors should also be taken into account. In the final analysis, they change the anticipated situation by 180 degrees. It should be said here that the territory/population size correlation is different in the two regions (see Table 1).

Table 1 shows that if we take into account the autonomous central part of the Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia) and exclude the corresponding parameters for Afghanistan from our investigation of Central Asia (for the same reason we exclude the Northern, Southeastern, and Southwestern Caucasus, due to the absence of de facto fairly developed autonomous political behavior, including independent security policy), we shall discover that the average population density of the Caucasian RSC is more than five times larger than the same parameter for Central Asia. Even if we

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ See: *The CIA World Factbook 2006 — Uzbekistan*, available at [<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html>], 3 December, 2006.

Table 1

**General Correlation between Population and
Territory (Population Density)
in the Caucasian and Central Asian RSC¹²**

No.	Regional Security Complex	Territory (thou. sq km)	Population Size (million)	Density
1.	Central Asian (including Afghanistan)	4,564.8	91.2	19.8
2.	Central Asian (without Afghanistan)	3,917.3	60.1	15.4
3.	Caucasian (entire region)	905.1	50.5	56.1
4.	Caucasian (limited to the independent republics—Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia)	184.2	15.6	84.6

discuss the indices for the entire region (the Central, Northern, Southeastern, and Southwestern parts of the Caucasus, as well as the five Central Asian republics plus Afghanistan), the difference remains large (nearly three-fold). All other conditions being equal, this means that the risk of social conflicts in Central Asia produced by “territorial deficit” securitization is at least four times lower. The case of the Ferghana Valley confirms the point: the region, which since the late 1980s has been the seat of potential conflicts, is marked by the highest population density (up to 500 per 1 sq km).¹³ This is the only area in the region where territorial rivalry is high. Central Asia differs in this respect from the Caucasus, where there are much more similarly densely populated areas.

Ethnic Homo/Heterogeneity

Ethnic and religious specifics of the competing entities are additional, and very important, factors that could affect any of the territorial conflicts in the regions discussed. The natural and logical conclusion is that the likelihood of rivalry over favorable living conditions developing into a conflict is higher in ethnically and confessionally heterogeneous populations. Regional realities demonstrate considerable differences, which can be used to explain the general stimuli for regional security relations and the current differences in their relative negative/positive nature within the Caucasian and Central Asian RSC.

¹² The figures for Central Asia and the Caucasus are based on information taken from *The CIA World Factbook 2006*. The figures (2002) are based on calculations for the sub-regional divisions of the Caucasus (Northern, Southwestern and Southeastern) found in E. Ismailov, V. Papava, op. cit., pp. 67, 73.

¹³ See: N. Ziadullaev, “Central Asia in a Globalizing World: Current Trends and Prospects,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (42), 2006, pp. 125-126.

Let's have a look at the ratio between the conventionally titular and non-titular ethnoses, as well as the average population density of the two regions' political expanse (see Table 2). This ratio may affect the domestic bias toward conflicts in the countries of the Caucasian and Central Asian RSC and their relations. We all know that the conflictive nature of the region came to the fore on the eve of the Soviet Union's disintegration and the weakened "overlay" regime. The table takes this factor, which is dated to 1989 (based on the last Soviet population census), and the current data into account.

Table 2

**Correlation between the Titular and
Non-Titular Ethnoses and Population Density
in the Countries of the Caucasian and Central-Asian RSC
(1989 and 2006)¹⁴**

No.	State	Total Population		Titular Ethnos (percent)		Non-Titular Ethnoses (percent)		Coefficient of Population Density	
		1989	2006	1989	2006	1989	2006	1989	2006
1.	Azerbaijan	7,021,178	7,961,619	82.7	90.6	17.3	9.4	81.5	92.4
2.	Armenia	3,304,776	2,976,372	93.3	97.9	6.7	2.1	116.3	104.8
3.	Afghanistan	—	31,056,997	—	42	—	58	—	47.9
4.	Georgia	5,400,841	4,661,473	70.1	83.8	29.9	16.2	77.4	66.8
5.	Kazakhstan	16,464,464	15,233,244	39.7	53.4	60.3	46.6	6.2	5.7
6.	Kyrgyzstan	4,257,755	5,213,898	52.3	64.9	47.7	35.1	22.2	27.2
7.	Tajikistan	5,092,603	7,320,815	62.3	79.9	37.7	20.1	35.7	51.3
8.	Turkmenistan	3,522,717	5,042,920	72.0	85	28	15	7.2	10.3
9.	Uzbekistan	19,810,077	27,307,134	71.3	80	28.7	20	46.6	64.1

The above suggests that although the three states of the Caucasian RSC are ethnically less heterogeneous, this relative homogeneity is accompanied by their much higher population density, which, theoretically, should have exacerbated securitization of "territorial deficit" in this region compared with the Central Asian states. The table offers several very interesting figures: Azerbaijan and Armenia are the two most densely populated countries. We all know that the Armenian-Azeri conflict remains the most acute and bloodiest across the post-Soviet expanse. There is an obvious correlation

¹⁴ The table does not contain data relating to the ethnic situation in the Northern, Southeastern and Southwestern Caucasus, even though the heterogeneous nature of the Caucasus is associated more with these three sub-regions (particularly with the Northern Caucasus) than with the three Central Caucasian states. I explain this by the fact that it is very difficult to identify the titular or the non-titular status of the ethnoses in the three parts of the Caucasus. The sub-regions are not politically independent parts of the Russian Federation, Iran or Turkey. Under these conditions, the titular/non-titular label is meaningless. The figures are based on data taken from *The CIA World Factbook 2006*, as well as on the data of the U.S.S.R. population census of 1989 (see: "Rasselenie narodov SSSR po soiuzyim respublikam po perepisi 1989 g.," *Soyuz*, No. 32, August 1990).

between the acutest conflict dynamics between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the “territorial deficit” as perceived by the public of the two countries, even though there are other factors that triggered the conflict and are keeping it going. The late 1980s was a very important period and turning point in the development of the post-Soviet bias toward conflict in the relations between the two nations. It was during this period that the two republics reached the highest level of ethnic heterogeneity: in Azerbaijan, it was 82.7/17.3 and in Armenia 93.3/6.7 percent.

The “territorial deficit” as perceived by the public is becoming an independent securitization object and, as such, affects the states’ behavior in the security sphere. This is best illustrated by Armenia and its behavior in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and in its geopolitical context as a whole. The conflict was initiated by Armenia’s territorial claims (its population density coefficient in 1989 was 116.3, the highest in the Central Eurasian region) to the neighboring republic. By 1994, by the time the cease-fire agreement was signed, Armenia had occupied not only Nagorno-Karabakh with its predominantly Armenian population (the war’s original cause), but also seven districts of Azerbaijan with a total area of about 9,988 sq km¹⁵ and a predominantly Azeri population that was driven away from the captured areas. The facts of illegal settlement of Armenians on the Armenia-occupied territories of Azerbaijan exacerbated the conflict in late 2004 and early 2005 to the extent that a Special OCSE Mission had to come to the conflict area. It registered that at least 15-16,000 Armenians had settled illegally in the occupied Azeri territories.¹⁶

This example is illustrative in another respect: “territorial deficit” securitization in Armenia turned out to be powerful enough to affect the country’s relations with nearly all of its close neighbors. Indeed, its relations with three (Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Georgia) out of four of its neighbors (Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, and Iran) are strained to different degrees because of territorial issues; there are other factors behind this as well. The hostility perceptions in Armenian’s relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey are especially strong: it is at war with the former and has no diplomatic relations with the latter; in the case of Turkey, the conflictive level is high enough to develop into an armed confrontation.

To assess the domestic ethnopolitical dynamics, let’s have a look at the ethno-territorial descriptions of the two republics on the eve of the Soviet Union’s demise. These countries, now part of the Caucasian RSC, are today, as they were in 1989, the most densely populated. By the end of the 1980s, that is, on the eve of the heightened ethnopolitical conflict, the titular/non-titular population ratio was different from what we have today. It would be logical to expect that the presence of ethnic minorities in the densely populated states and other social problems (economic decline, the ideological vacuum, and the still unfinished quest for national identity) may create a conflictive domestic ethnopolitical situation. Whether or not ethnic minorities have been living in compact groups on definite territories for a long time may prove to be very important: population mobility within a state or its permanent settlement in definite places may affect the intensity of ethnopolitical conflicts to different extents.

On the one hand, the prospects for the ethnopolitical situation in Azerbaijan, seen in the context of the correlation of domestic demographic and territorial factors, are much more complicated than in Armenia, which is essentially a mono-ethnic state. In Azerbaijan, on the other hand, there are compact ethnic communities. This is one side of the coin. “Territorial deficit” securitization in Armenia is much higher than elsewhere in the Caucasian RSC, which will affect its security policy

¹⁵ They are the Lachin (1,835 sq km), Kelbajar (3,054 sq km), Agdam (1,154 sq km), Fizuli (1,386 sq km), Jebrail (1,050 sq km), Gubadla (802 sq km), and Zangilan (707 sq km) districts.

¹⁶ According to the calculations made in Azerbaijan, there are 23,000 Armenians illegally residing in the occupied districts (see: Republic of Azerbaijan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs [http://www.mfa.gov.az/img/map_eng.gif], 2 August, 2007).

and maintain tension in its relations with its neighbors. This may trigger negative dynamics within the region.

The case of Georgia offers no less pertinent generalizations. The population density coefficient on the eve of the end of the Soviet era and in 2006 was much lower than in Azerbaijan and Armenia (77.4 in 1989 and 66.8 in 2006), but higher than in any of the post-Soviet Central Asian states. At the same time, today, as in the late 1980s, Georgia remains ethnically the most heterogeneous of the states in the Caucasian RSC.

The ethnic minorities of Georgia comprise a considerable part of its population, even after the post-Soviet migration wave. They mainly live in compact groups along Georgia's borders. Two such areas, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, were highly autonomous parts of the Georgian S.S.R. both in theory and in practice. This, as well as the weakened central power structures and the acute political instability of the late 1980s channeled "territorial deficit" securitization within rather than beyond the country (the cases of Azerbaijan and Armenia). In other words, the two autonomous republics vs. central power in Tbilisi became securitizing actors; the role of referent object applied to Georgia's territory as a whole. The ethnic groups of the two autonomous formations, as well as those in other parts of the country (the Georgians of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Abkhazians and Ossets living elsewhere in Georgia), were regarded as sources of danger. Here is an interesting fact: with a total population of 525,061 in the late 1980s¹⁷ and a total territory of 8,600 sq km (population coefficient of 61.0), the numerical strength of the Abkhazian population proper was merely 93,267, or 17.8 percent.¹⁸ The number of local ethnic Georgians was 239,872, or 45.7 percent,¹⁹ of the republic's total population. This ratio might have strengthened securitization of the "territorial deficit" in the autonomy, which had been striving for independence from Georgia for some time, and encouraged the Abkhazian authorities to evict the Georgians from the republic. By the late 1980s, South Ossetia reached the same threshold: of the total population of 98,500 living on a territory of 3,900 sq km, 29 percent were Georgians and 66.2 percent Ossets.²⁰

The Central Asian territorial-demographic picture offers no less interesting conclusions. Tajikistan is a pertinent example: its ethnic heterogeneity/population density coefficient-conflict potential correlation is the most indicative. The newly independent republic had to cope with the bloody civil war of 1992-1996, the first manifestation of trouble in the more or less stable post-Soviet situation in the region as a whole. It remains specific to the same extent to which the ethno-territorial situation in the republic is specific.

It is the smallest in the Central Asian RSC with the third largest population (see Table 2). The ethno-linguistic situation and the degree of the population's heterogeneity are also highly specific. First, Table 2 shows that today, as it was in 1989, the population density in Tajikistan is one the highest among the former Soviet Central Asian republics (35.7 and 51.3, respectively): the country comes second after Uzbekistan. Second, the difference between the shares of the titular and non-titular population in the total population is relatively insignificant: the republic comes third in this respect after Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Third, the republic's titular population belongs to the Iranian Indo-European ethno-linguistic group, which means that Tajikistan is the only non-Turkic republic in an otherwise Turkic region.

This led to a relatively high level of "territorial deficit" securitization yet, like in Georgia of the late 1980s, its vector was directed within the country rather than beyond it. Just like in Georgia, eth-

¹⁷ See: G. Hewitt, "Abkhazia, Georgia and the Circassians (NW Caucasus)," *Central Asian Survey*, No. 18 (4), 1999, p. 463.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ See: *Georgia: Society, Language and Culture, Population*, available at [<http://webzone.imer.mah.se/projects/georgianV04/DEMO/GeoLINK/Intro2.html>], 2 August, 2007.

no-political conflict trends accelerated in Tajikistan because central power proved to be weak; local ethnic and clan groups acted as securitizing actors. The civil war ended in the mid-1990s, probably not so much under the impact of endogenous factors: the Russian armed forces deployed in Tajikistan obviously did not limit themselves to peace keeping and border guarding, which means that the domestic conflict dynamics were suppressed or overlaid by Russia's military presence.

The external vectors of Tajikistan's "territorial" securitization are closely connected with Uzbekistan, the most populous post-Soviet Central Asian state with the third largest territory in the region, which makes the republic the regional leader in terms of population density coefficient: 46.6 in the late 1980s and 64.1 today. In this respect and in the titular/non-titular population ratio, Uzbekistan comes close to the states of the Caucasian RSC. Table 2 shows that in both periods, the difference between the shares of the titular and non-titular populations in the total population of Uzbekistan was one of the region's highest.²¹ Logic suggests that judging by the first parameter, Uzbekistan should have a high level of "territorial" securitization and, correspondingly, a high conflict level inside the republic and in its relations with its neighbors. For the same reason, the second index should have quenched the domestic conflict potential. On the other hand, however, whereas the first parameter is fairly prominent, the second parameter cannot always reduce the conflict level of the country's relations with its closest neighbors. Destabilization of such relations is highly possible. In this case, the possible scenario depends on the other factors involved in "territorial" securitization of the countries discussed. The ethnic minorities in one state, which are in the majority (titular ethnoses) in a neighboring state, the extent to which they tend to live in compact groups, the distance between such places and their historical homeland, the level of political autonomy, etc. are all ethno-territorial factors.

Uzbekistan's strained relations with its neighbors—Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and to a considerable extent, Kazakhstan—are caused, among other things, by the specifics of population distribution within its borders. The largest part of its 25 million-strong population is crowded in the east, while the west and the center with their harsh climates are sparsely populated. The western parts of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which border on the densely populated parts of Uzbekistan, are also overpopulated. Here I particularly have in mind the Ferghana Valley, an overpopulated and ethnically variegated area, which in the late 1980s was the scene of one of the most tragic events in the region's history: an ethnic conflict that drove away over 90,000 Meskhetian Turks.²² This population distribution on both sides of the border (in Uzbekistan, on the one hand, and in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, on the other) presupposes a high level of "territorial" securitization in all of these countries. The local nations regard one another and the compact ethnic groups on their territories ethnically related to the ethnic majorities across the border as a threat.

On the whole, according to Table 2 the population density coefficient in Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and especially in Kazakhstan is much lower than in the other two Central Asian states, which somewhat defuses the impact of the "territorial deficit" on the general securitization process. This means that these states are less inclined to military-political expansion. The above, however, does not exclude the possibility of them taking up arms against their neighbors to defend themselves. Internal ethnopolitical dynamics might cause an international conflict: because they have the highest level of ethnic heterogeneity in the region, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are potentially more likely to be involved in such conflicts.

Turkmenistan is the region's most stable state in terms of the population density coefficient/ethnic structure ratio. Indeed, its population density coefficient²³ is one of the lowest in Central Asia (even

²¹ In this respect, Uzbekistan comes second after Turkmenistan (see Table 2).

²² See: A. Yunusov, *Meskhetinskie Turki: Dvazhdy deportirovanniy narod*, Zaman Publishers, Baku, 2000, p. 95.

²³ In this respect, Turkmenistan comes second after Kazakhstan.

if we take into account the fact that a large part of its territory is covered by desert), which means that the republic's vast territory, second to Kazakhstan's, is one of the least densely populated of the Central Asian countries (see Table 2). This creates a low level of "territorial deficit" securitization and limits contacts with neighbors on territorial issues. The domestic ethnopolitical conflict potential is likewise very low mainly due to the country's relatively simple ethnic structure. Today, as in the Soviet past, Turkmenistan is the least ethnically heterogeneous republic among its Central Asian neighbors. Table 2 shows that the titular/non-titular correlation in these periods was 72/28 and 85/15, respectively. The share of the non-titular population will continue decreasing, which will soon make Turkmenistan the only mono-ethnic Central Asian republic.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

The territorial-demographic correlation and ethnic heterogeneity obviously cannot serve as the only, or a sufficient basis for a comprehensive assessment of the securitization processes now underway in the states of the Caucasian and Central Asian RSC. At the same time, these factors are obviously important for forming basic security perceptions within the regional political systems. The degree of development of such systems and the level of its "maturity" affect the degree of securitization of all the factors mentioned above.

The development level of the Caucasian and Central Asian RSC does not allow us to talk about a considerable degree of de-securitization of the geography- and ethnicity-connected factors, which can be observed in Western Europe. It means that they should be taken into account as the key endogenous factors of the security relations within these two regional complexes of Central Eurasia.

The differences in the territorial-demographic and ethnic structures can explain why the security relations in post-Soviet Central Asia are not developing into open armed conflicts, as distinct from what is going on in the Caucasus. As on the eve of the post-Soviet conflict situation, the level of "territorial deficit" securitization is higher today in the Caucasian RSC than it is in the Central Asian RSC. The conflict potential is somewhat alleviated by the populations' fairly active mobility and labor migration as its part.

The situation might change because of different demographic dynamics and population mobility²⁴ or, to be more precise, due to a stronger "territorial deficit" factor in the securitization process in the Central Asian states and, correspondingly, to its weakening within the Caucasian RSC, with all the repercussions for regional security. No matter what, this is possible, all other things being equal, which, as we know, very rarely remain equal.

²⁴ For example, the demographic differences in the two regions suggest very interesting ideas. According to *UNDP Human Development Report 2006*, an annual population increase in the Central Caucasian republics in 2004-2015 will be: in Azerbaijan (+0.8), in Armenia (-0.2), in Georgia (-0.7); in the republics of Central Asia: in Kazakhstan (-0.0), in Kyrgyzstan (+1.1), in Tajikistan (+1.5), in Turkmenistan (+1.3), and in Uzbekistan (+1.4) (see: *UNDP Human Development Report 2006, Demographic Trend, Annual Population Growth Rate (%)*, available at [<http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/statistics/indicators/39.html>], 11 June, 2007).

ARMED FORCES AND MILITARY REFORM IN KYRGYZSTAN

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I n t r o d u c t i o n

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyzstan started hastily building its own Armed Forces. Although the Kyrgyz Republic inherited some military units and weapons from the powerful Soviet Empire, it lacked defense infrastructure and efficient command personnel. More than 15 years have passed since then. During this time a national military security system has been put in place, the Armed Forces being its core.

This article considers the status of Kyrgyzstan's Armed Forces, the evolution of state security policy, and measures to advance military reform in the republic.¹

¹ In the present article, the terms "military reform" and "reform of the Armed Forces" are used interchangeably. Since the Defense Ministry is the core of the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz Republic, this article devotes more attention to activities implemented by the ministry.

1. The Composition and Structure of the Armed Forces

Kyrgyzstan's Armed Forces comprise ground, naval, air, and air defense units, military agencies and military training establishments, and local military command and control agencies.² At present, in accordance with the Military Doctrine of the Kyrgyz Republic (Art 2.12), the Armed Forces of Kyrgyzstan comprise:

1. The Defense Ministry.
2. The Border Service.
3. The Interior Ministry (MVD) Internal Troops.
4. The National Security Service.
5. The Environmental Protection and Emergency Situations Ministry.
6. The National Guard.

² The Law on Defense No. 1462-XII of 13 April, 1994, Art 13.

7. The State Protection Service.

8. Military Justice Agencies.

Structurally, the Armed Forces include general purpose forces, rapid deployment, rapid reaction and state border protection forces.

The Armed Forces are built on the basis of a professional, regular army. The president is the commander in chief of the Armed Forces. The general supervision of the Armed Forces is exercised by the president and the government. Immediate command of the Armed Forces is ensured by the Defense Ministry through the General Staff, which is an agency that provides direct command and control of troops and develops plans for the use of troops.³

At present, the Defense Ministry has about 8,000 servicemen.⁴

2. State Military Policy and Military Reform in Kyrgyzstan

Before considering specific moves in the organizational development and reform of the KR Armed Forces, it is essential to answer the question: “Why is military reform so important for the republic?” There are several reasons for that.

- *First*, following the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of a bipolar world order, the nature of security threats has changed substantially. Global wars with large armies and clearly defined adversaries have become history. Now other threats are on the agenda: local conflicts, international and national terrorism, drug trafficking, and so on.
- *Second*, during the Soviet era, military servicemen were trained for operations on the Western theater—that is to say, in Europe. That is irrelevant for Kyrgyzstan today. Practice shows that infiltration into Kyrgyzstan, 70 percent of whose territory is occupied by mountains, occurs mainly via mountain paths: In other words, militants prefer to operate on mountainous terrain. Therefore, the modern military should be in a position to respond to real needs—i.e., be compact, mobile, flexible, well controlled and effective in operating on mountainous terrain.
- *Third*, the principle of manpower acquisition in the military should change from draft to professional, contract service. In that case, specially trained personnel will operate and service military equipment and conduct combat operations. Furthermore, many outstanding problems will be eliminated—e.g., corruption in the process of recruitment, desertion, hazing, and so on.
- *Fourth*, the KR Armed Forces are still rather off-limits to society. In the context of a democratic state, it is necessary to practice greater openness and transparency—for example, with the help of civil and parliamentary oversight.

Several stages in the evolution of state defense policy can be singled out in Kyrgyzstan.

³ Ibid., Art 13 (see also: Military Doctrine, Arts 1.11-1.18).

⁴ See: A. Kasybekov, “Armia opiat’ stala ne nuzhna?” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 22 September, 2006, available at [<http://members.vb.kg/2006/09/22/protivn/3.html>], 3 March, 2007.

2.1. Stage 1 (1991-1999)

In 1993, Kyrgyzstan sent a peacekeeping force to neighboring Tajikistan (500 troops) to protect Tajikistan's state border with Afghanistan, which remained there until February 1999.⁵

At that time, a public debate about the expediency of the military was ongoing in the republic. On the one hand, the proposal that the Armed Forces be disbanded stemmed from the country's financial difficulties. The thesis about the republic's peace-loving policy was quite popular: "We are a peaceful nation; we will not attack anyone nor will anyone attack us." On the other hand, the inappropriate attitude toward national defense arose from the fact that force development was driven not by a threat of attack from the outside, but rather by the need to create a semblance of such an institution as an essential element of statehood.

That initial stage was marked by declining morale in the Armed Forces, caused by financial problems, the nonpayment of wages and other allowances, and the falling prestige of military service. Military servicemen were leaving the defense related structures in droves. That trend was reflected in official documents. In particular, in 1994, in a special resolution, the government directed the Defense Ministry to "analyze the causes of the outflow of officer cadre from the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz Republic and ... to submit their proposals to the Government."⁶ Other shortcomings, according to government agencies, included a lack of coordination between the various arms and branches of service, especially in operations on mountainous terrain, negligence with respect to storage, operation and maintenance of arms and military equipment, theft, desertions, and rampant crime in the military.⁷

The subsequent document regulating the course of military reform appeared in 1998.⁸ In accordance with that government resolution, an essential element of military reform was to be a national security concept, a military reform program for 1998-2005, and guidelines for military doctrine. Those documents provided for a downsizing of the Defense Ministry staff to 9,000, starting in 1999.⁹

In 1992 through 1999, the following laws were adopted: On Alternative (Non-Military) Service (1992, as amended in 1994), On Defense (1994, as amended in 1997), On the State Border of the Kyrgyz Republic (1999), and On the Border Service of the Kyrgyz Republic (1999).

In 1994, the first institution of civil control over the Armed Forces appeared in the country—the Public Association of Soldiers' Mothers. Representatives of this organization started visiting military units, meeting and talking with military commanders and servicemen with the aim of identifying instances of hazing, bullying, violation of servicemen's rights, and combating corruption and graft in the defense sector. Therefore, outstanding military problems had a big public response, causing law-enforcement and other agencies to take robust measures to tackle those problems.

2.2. Stage 2 (1999-2005)

One of the fundamental documents in state military policy is the 2002 Military Doctrine, which formulated the state policy of organizational development and reform of the Armed Forces in the Kyrgyz

⁵ KR Government Resolution No. 298 of 9 July, 1993, On Sending a Military Contingent to Reinforce the Protection of the Tajik-Afghan State Border. In September 1993, the peacekeeping force comprised, in addition to a Kyrgyz battalion, a Russian division (6,000 servicemen) and an Uzbek battalion (450) (see: R. Burnashev, "Tadzhikistan: politika i vooruzhennye sily," *Kontinent*, available at [<http://www.continent.kz/2002/14/13.html>], 20 May, 2007).

⁶ KR Government Resolution No. 396 of 8 June, 1994, On Progress of Reform in the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz Republic.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ KR Government Resolution No. 570 of 28 August, 1998, On Measures to Implement Resolution No. 1 of 31 July, 1998 of the KR Security Council, On the Status of Military Reform in the KR and Measures to Intensify It.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

Republic. The document stipulated that organizational development of the Armed Forces would proceed in three stages.

- At **Stage 1 (2002-2003)**, it was planned to create a legislative basis in ensuring military security and to continue preparing rapid reaction forces to rebuff possible penetration by international terrorists.
- At **Stage 2 (2004 through 2007)**, it was planned to organize and maintain armed forces that would be able—after being brought to full strength and mobilized—to perform various missions in local armed conflicts, independently or as part of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces of the Central Asian Collective Security Region.
- At **Stage 3 (2008 through 2010)**, it is planned to train and maintain the Armed Forces capable of performing missions in armed conflicts on a regional level, independently or as part of the Coalition Armed Forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).¹⁰

Strictly speaking, before 1999, the main goal was to *build* national armed forces. Although the republic inherited basic military components from the Soviet Union, the Armed Forces as a national institution and an essential element of the state had to be built from scratch. After 1999, first progress was made in the reform process. One landmark, in a sense, were the so-called Batken events (1999-2000). For two years in a row, a group of militants had been penetrating the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic, while its Armed Forces had to repel attacks by international terrorists.¹¹ Fifty-five military servicemen were killed and 88 wounded in clashes with terrorists who had twice intruded into the Batken region. The fighting displaced 8,000 people.¹² Terrorist attacks caused the state \$30 million damage.¹³

Those events showed how defenseless the republic was without its Armed Forces. Society and the ruling authorities realized the vital importance of maintaining the so-called power structures—both financially and morally, in order to boost the prestige of the Armed Forces.

Speaking in 2004 during the unveiling of a monument to military servicemen killed in action, Prime Minister N. Tanaev said: “The events of the past few years have shown that in order to ensure its stability and prosperity, the country needs powerful Armed Forces. The danger of regional destabilization remains: After all, various terrorist and extremist organizations are attempting to raise their profile.”¹⁴

So, what has been done in practice since then?

The first step was the unification of three western districts in the Osh region—Lialiak, Batken, and Kadamdzhai, which bordered on Tajikistan, as well as with the towns of Kyzyl Kia and Suliukta. The formation, in October 1999, of a new province—the Batken region—helped tackle socioeconomic development problems in the area by increasing the allocation of budgetary funding. Furthermore, units of the Kyrgyz Defense Ministry Southern Grouping of Forces were deployed in the region and in 2001, a military exercise was conducted there.

The next step was an increase in spending for the Armed Forces. In the spring of 2000, the government said that stable financing was ensured for the military.¹⁵ In 2001, the republic’s defense budget

¹⁰ KR military doctrine was adopted on 23 March, 2002 by the KR Security Council Resolution On the Military Doctrine of the Kyrgyz Republic during the Transition Period until 2010.

¹¹ The raid was an attempt by militants to break through Kyrgyz territory to Uzbekistan. In addition to that, shortly before the incursion, neighboring Tajikistan announced the closure of a civilian disarmament program.

¹² See: E. Satybekov, A. Kasybekov, “Batken: ispytanie na prochnost,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 16 October, 2002, available at [<http://members.vb.kg/2002/10/16/vizit/2.html>], 15 May, 2007.

¹³ In relation to the average rate of the dollar in 1999-2000—1.2 billion som.

¹⁴ A. Kasybekov, “Batken zhivet v nashikh serdtsakh,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 31 May, 2004, available at [<http://members.vb.kg/2004/05/31/panorama/1.html>], 17 May, 2007.

¹⁵ See: D. Glumskov, “Mirnogo neba, zemliaki,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 24 March, 2000.

was \$18.7 million (897 million som), or 1.2 percent of GDP; in 2002, it was \$22 million (1.03 billion som), or 1.4 percent of GDP; in 2003, \$26.7 million (1.12 billion som), or 1.3 percent of GDP.¹⁶ Subsequently, the question of increasing defense spending was brought up on several occasions. In particular, addressing a meeting of the National Security Council in May 2004, President Akaev said that “the economic growth of the past few years makes it possible to support the Armed Forces not only morally but also financially.”¹⁷ G. Afonina, a representative of the Soldiers Mothers’ Committee who had just inspected a number of military units, also pointed to an improvement in the military’s financial situation: “The food and supply situation in the Army has improved recently. So young men from poor families are joining the service without any coercion: They will be fed and clad here.”¹⁸

Yet another important measure implemented during that period was the reorganization of state control in the security and defense realm. Thus, on 4 January, 2001, the National Security Service was created (replacing the National Security Ministry). Furthermore, the NSS was placed outside the executive chain of command and control and was made answerable directly to the president. The reorganization also applied to the Border Service. It was created in 1997 as the Main Directorate of the Border Service¹⁹ in the structure of the National Security Ministry. Following the withdrawal of Russian border guards in 1999, the service had by 2002 gone through a series of reorganizations.²⁰ The Border Service, comprised of the Main Border Protection Directorate of the Defense Ministry and the Main Border Control Directorate of the National Security Ministry, in August 2002, was reorganized as an independent agency. Whereas in 1999, the Border Service had about 3,000 servicemen,²¹ by 2002, its numerical strength increased to 5,000²² and in the subsequent two years, to 6,000.²³ Today the Border Service answers directly to the president of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Alongside the reorganization of the existing “power bodies,” in 2002, formation of rapid reaction units began. These special purpose units were created to repel attacks by international terrorists and extremists. Their main distinguishing feature was their ability to conduct combat operations on mountainous terrain. Special purpose units are provided with special gear and equipment to operate in mountain areas. They also receive special food rations. They are manned on a contract basis.²⁴ It would be appropriate here to draw a parallel with Russian mountain brigades. Incidentally, the only Soviet-

¹⁶ According to the KR National Bank exchange rate. Sources for 2001-2002 data: *Otchet po itogam proverki Otcheta Pravitelstva Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki ob ispolnenii respublikanskogo biudzheta za 2002 god*, Schetnaia palata KR, available at [http://www.ach.gov.kg/otchet_2.html], 31 May, 2007. Sources for 2003 data: *Rashodnaia chast biudzheta za 2003 god*, KR Finance Ministry, available at [http://www.minfin.kg/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=296], 31 May, 2007.

¹⁷ A. Otorbaeva, “Ves generalitet, i ob odnom,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 15 June, 2004, available at [http://members.vb.kg/2004/06/15/panorama/6.html], 1 June, 2007.

¹⁸ “Pomogi armii,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 20 April, 2004, available at [http://members.vb.kg/2004/04/20/prizyv/4.html], 25 March, 2007.

¹⁹ Statute No. 332 of 14 October, 1998, On the Main Directorate of the Border Service of the Defense Ministry of the Kyrgyz Republic.

²⁰ For example, in May 1999, the Border Service was divided in two wings—the Main Border Protection Directorate, as part of the Defense Ministry, with the function of protecting the state border (about 3,000 servicemen). The second wing, the Main for Border Control Directorate (about 300 servicemen), as part of the National Security Ministry, tasked with ensuring controlled border crossing (see: Decree of the President of the KR No. 131 of 28 May, 1999, On the Border Service of the KR).

²¹ Ibidem.

²² Decree of the President of the KR No. 241 of 31 August, 2002, On the Border Service of the KR.

²³ Decree of the President of the KR No. 366 of 18 November, 2003, On Introducing the Amendments into the Decree of the President of the KR On the Border Service of the KR of 31 August, 2002, and Decree of the President of the KR No. 352 of 13 October, 2004, On Introducing the Amendments into the Decree of the President of the KR On the Border Service of the KR of 31 August, 2002.

²⁴ See: Iu. Orlova, “Kirghizia sozdaet sobstvennye sily bystrogo razvertyvaniia,” *RIA Novosti*, 2 August, 2002, available at [http://www.rian.ru/defense_safety/20020802/201750.html], 20 March, 2007.

era mountain brigade (the 68th Independent Motorized Rifle Brigade) was based in the Kirghiz S.S.R., in the Alai Valley.²⁵

At that stage, personnel training programs were launched at national military training establishments. One of them was the Bishkek Higher Military School (formerly the Bishkek Military Flight Training College). First four-year training programs were started in 2001.²⁶

The structure of the Armed Forces was also reorganized: The Defense Ministry abandoned the Soviet-era “regiment-division” system and adopted the “battalion-brigade” system, which makes it possible to conduct independent action in specific sectors of operation.²⁷

In the interest of strengthening the nation’s defense capability and enhancing the prestige of the Armed Forces, the course was set for increasing the share of career and contract servicemen. The term of conscript service was reduced from 18 months to 12: President A. Akaev issued an appropriate decree in 2004.²⁸ The transfer of the Armed Forces to a professional [contract] basis was designed also to help resolve numerous social problems. According to E. Topoev, the country’s defense minister in 2002, “today, the number of conscripts greatly exceeds the Army’s manpower needs.”²⁹

During that period, the Soldiers Mothers’ Committee continued to work proactively, initiating checks at military enlistment offices throughout the country and instituting the use of anonymous comment cards at all military units.³⁰ In addition to that, special parents’ committees were periodically inspecting military subunits, reporting the results of their “raids” to the Defense Ministry leadership.³¹

Despite all of those measures, the situation in the Armed Forces left much to be desired. “Today, our Armed Forces are, figuratively speaking, in a dormant state. The situation in that area is deplorable,” MP K. Baibolov said in 2003.³²

That situation eroded the credibility of the “power agencies” and prompted the Kyrgyz parliament to consider instituting parliamentary control over the military.³³ In 2003, a group of MPs prepared a draft law on civilian control of the country’s Armed Forces. Under the document, the activity of the republic’s power agencies was to be monitored not only by state structures but also by representatives of civil society—political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and research and scientific establishments. The draft also provided for the introduction of a new post—official representative for military servicemen’s affairs. The parliament was ready to consider yet another proposal within the framework of military reform—to permit civilians to be appointed to head military departments and agencies.³⁴ But for various reasons the draft law was never passed.

²⁵ See: I. Plugatarev, “Est vse, krome lichnogo sostava,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 26 January, 2007, available at [http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2007-01-26/3_ludi.html], 25 March, 2007.

²⁶ See: Decree of the President of the KR No. 184 of 15 July, 2000, On the Establishment of the Bishkek Military School of the Armed Forces of the KR, and KR Government Resolution No. 12 of 17 January, 2001, On Implementation of the Decree of the President of the KR No. 184 of 15 July, 2000, On the Establishment of the Bishkek Military School of the Armed Forces of the KR.

²⁷ A series of interviews *Kak obespechit zashchitu granits Kyrgyzstana?* 5 June, 2006, an interview with K. Tynaliyev, deputy chief of staff of the KR Armed Forces, available at [http://www.open.kg/ru/blics_archive_2006/blics_border_security], 26 May, 2007.

²⁸ See: “Dinozavry v sapogakh,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 30 July, 2004, available at [<http://members.vb.kg/2004/07/30/panorama/14.html>], 20 April, 2007.

²⁹ Iu. Orlova, “Kirghizia pristupit k formirovaniu professionalnoi armii,” *RIA Novosti*, 2 August, 2002, available at [http://www.rian.ru/defense_safety/20020802/201663.html], 30 May, 2007.

³⁰ See: S. Kozhemiakin, “Galina Afonina: ‘Ne nado boiatsia sluzhit v armii,’” *Bely parokhod*, 16 February, 2007, available at [http://www.parokhod.kg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4943], 16 February, 2007.

³¹ See: “Pomogi armii,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 20 April, 2004.

³² E. Temir, “Nedorosli budut vkalyvat kak vse,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 8 October, 2003, available at [<http://members.vb.kg/2003/10/08/politika/4.html>], 29 June, 2007.

³³ See: D. Karimov, “Deputatam teper ne khvataet armii,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 27 May, 2003, available at [<http://members.vb.kg/2003/05/27/politika/1.html>], 26 March, 2007.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

2.3. Stage 3 (2005-2007)

Following the change of leadership in the country, after 24 March, 2005, the guidelines for state military policy were also revised. As will be shown below, priority shifted to the development of the social infrastructure of the Armed Forces and improving their image.

Reorganization measures in state governance, which were implemented after 24 March, applied to several “power” ministries.

A month after he came into office, acting President K. Bakiev signed a decree on the reorganization of the Border Service as the Border Troops of the National Security Service.³⁵ However, following a raid by a group of militants (12 May, 2006)³⁶ the Border Troops were removed from under the command of the National Security Service and reorganized as an integrated executive power agency. They had their former name returned to them—the Border Service. The chairman of the Border Service was as of now appointed by the president of the Kyrgyz Republic.³⁷

Yet another consequence of the raid by militants was the adoption of a law (on 8 June, 2006) stripping the National Security Service of the right to investigate criminal cases related to economic and abuse of office offenses. That enabled the NSS to focus on intelligence and counter terrorism activity—that is to say, on its principal mission.³⁸ Subsequent reorganization of the NSS occurred in early 2007, following the adoption of an amended Constitution. The NSS was reorganized into the State Committee for National Security and incorporated into the structure of the government—in other words, it ceased answering directly to the president.³⁹

Reform of the Armed Forces per se comprises several components: transition to a one-year term of conscription service, raising the draft age to 20, and the related system of deferrals. At present—the financial situation not being favorable enough—the Armed Forces rely for manpower acquisition both on conscripts and contract servicemen. In 2006, the share of contract servicemen was 15 percent.⁴⁰

Yet another innovation was relieving military servicemen of a part of the so-called economic functions [functions unrelated to their military duties]: in order not to distract conscripts from essential training, 300 to 350 jobs were created for civilian employees—at canteens and other auxiliary services.⁴¹

In addition to that, as of 2006, in the interest of strengthening military discipline, conscripts started serving in units located not less than 300 km away from the place of their permanent residence.

Military reform also extended to formal trappings, including the translation of official documentation and military terminology into Kyrgyz, the state language, and the introduction in 2005 of na-

³⁵ Decree of the Acting President of the KR No. 183 of 23 May, 2005, On Measures to Improve State Administration in the Security Sphere of the KR.

³⁶ All militants were activists of the outlawed Islamic Movement of Afghanistan (IMU). Units of the National Security Service Special Operations Directorate Alfa, the Interior Ministry Special Purpose Forces, and the Border Troops participated in the counter terrorism operation. KR losses: six killed, including four military servicemen; militant losses: four killed, one captured. There were 10 militants in all. According to law-enforcement agencies, the group planned to stage a number of terrorist attacks in the Ferghana Valley to “celebrate” the anniversary of the Andijan events in Uzbekistan (see: Iu. Kuzminykh, “Oni vypolnili svoi dolg,” *Vechernii Bishkek*, 16 May, 2006, available at [<http://members.vb.kg/2006/05/16/anti/1.html>], 6 May, 2007).

³⁷ Decree of the President of the KR No. 270 of 22 May, 2006, On Improving State Administration in Protecting the KR State Border.

³⁸ See: “Deputaty otobrali u SNB belovorotnichkovye dela,” *Delo No.*, 14 June, 2006.

³⁹ Decree of the President of the KR No. 96 of 16 March, 2007, On Organizational Measures to Ensure the Implementation of the KR Law on the Structure of the KR Government.

⁴⁰ See: G. Platonov, “Osobennosti natsionalnogo prizyva,” *Delo No.*, 18 October, 2006, available at [<http://delo.ktnet.kg/2006/35/07.shtml>], 28 March, 2007.

⁴¹ See: “Kirghizskaia armia pereshla na prizyv s 20 let,” *Delo No.*, 14 June, 2006.

tional military uniforms and insignia.⁴² For 14 years prior to that, the republic's military servicemen had worn Soviet and then Russian uniforms. Sometimes servicemen were issued U.S., Turkish or French clothing and equipment, supplied as humanitarian aid from NATO member countries. Today the Defense Ministry places contracts among domestic producers, who make military uniforms not only for the Armed Forces but for all power structures in the republic.

There has been a visible improvement in the **organization of logistics**. According to the Defense Ministry press service, exercise and training facilities, including field engineering structures, artificial obstacles and assault courses, are being modernized and upgraded. Servicemen participate in night time tactical and live fire drills. Tank, CW, artillery, and engineer subunits exercise on a regular basis. Supply of fuel and lubricating materials to all military units is improving, which makes it possible to conduct scheduled motor vehicle and armor drills.⁴³

As for advanced **professional training of military servicemen**, every year about 40 Defense Ministry officers upgrade their qualifications at special training courses abroad.

In early 2007, the Defense Ministry Center for Advanced Officer and NCO Training was opened, offering one-month professional training courses. Furthermore, in 2005, the NCO Training School of the Combined Arms Training Center of the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz Republic was opened at the Second Independent Motorized Rifle Brigade. The NCO institution is especially important in the process of transition to contract service, since it helps relieve the officers' workload and shift a substantial part of duties and responsibilities to NCOs. NCO schools prepare section commanders and deputy commanders of motorized rifle, mountain, and special purpose sub-units.

Students at the Bishkek Higher Military School with the best grades are entitled to a special stipend (about \$12).

Changes in social infrastructure include the building of new homes and apartments for officers and NCOs, renovation of a hotel for military servicemen in Bishkek, repair and modernization of storehouses and bath and laundry facilities, modernization and upgrading of military polyclinics in Bishkek and Osh, and renovation of the Defense Ministry Tamga sanatorium.

Representatives of civil society note that the improvement of social infrastructure and housing conditions has generally helped improve the image of the Armed Forces: "On the whole, there has been a substantial improvement, which benefited everyone... I remember when keys to the first few apartments were being presented to officers' families, one colonel started crying in full view of everyone. That was hardly surprising, considering that a person, whose children are already over 20, has had to rent housing throughout his life. Many officers have received apartments of their own. Second, the new minister immediately paid attention to how the servicemen are clad and equipped, what sort of food they eat, and in what conditions they live."⁴⁴

Certain changes have also occurred in the relationship between civil society and the Defense Ministry. "The attitude toward us has changed considerably. Now I can easily call his aide and arrange for a meeting with the minister. 'Tomorrow, if necessary,' Isakov will say... Today, we are not in a state of confrontation with the military, but in dialog and cooperation," G. Afonina, chairman of the Soldiers Mothers' Committee, says.⁴⁵ The Soldiers Mothers' Committee continues a variety of activities in military units, including the organization of competitions (not least with the aim of eradicating such problems as hazing) and training in election technology. Not long ago, the republic's

⁴² Decree of the Acting President of the KR No. 311 of 11 August 2005, On National Military Uniforms and Insignia in the Armed Forces of the KR.

⁴³ See: T. Orlova, "Voyennye raportuiut s optimizmom," *MSN*, 22 November, 2005, available at [<http://www.msn.kg/ru/news/12028/>], 27 March, 2007.

⁴⁴ S. Kozhemyakin, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ *Ibidem.*

authorities put into practice yet another idea proposed by G. Afonina: In order to boost the prestige of the Armed Forces, official sending-off parties for conscripts, practiced during the Soviet era, have been restored. The first such event took place in the fall of 2006 on the central square of Bishkek, in the presence of city authorities and Defense Ministry officials, as well as the conscripts' parents.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Soldiers Mothers' Committee publishes its own magazine, *Armeisky pedsovet*, the *Tvoi prava soldat* [Soldiers Rights] bulletin, and other publications.

Therefore, the Defense Ministry's cooperation with this civil society institution helps improve the image of the military in the public eye.⁴⁷

Yet another important development has been the introduction of parliamentary control over military organizations in Kyrgyzstan. A draft law on parliamentary control was previously rejected by the government and sent back for a review in 2006.⁴⁸ An amended version of the bill was approved by the Kyrgyz parliament in January 2007. In accordance with the document, the law makers may determine the command and control system in the KR Armed Forces and the procedure for the use and employment of the Armed Forces, as well as the purposes, principles and powers of the republic's Armed Forces. The deputies established the Office of the Parliamentary Representative for the Affairs of Military Organizations. The entire Armed Forces are now subject to parliamentary control.⁴⁹

3. Problems

In accordance with the Law on Defense, funding for defense programs is provided from the budget of the Kyrgyz Republic (Art 21). However, military officers of different ranks have admitted in personal interviews that military reform cannot be implemented effectively enough due to severe under funding of the military.

Experts say that only 20 percent to 50 percent of the military needs are being met.⁵⁰ Therefore, the military leadership is looking for additional sources of funding. One of the extra budgetary sources of funding is the sale of morally and technically obsolete weapon systems, as well as Soviet era military equipment. According to K. Tynaliev, deputy chief of staff of the KR Armed Forces, "we have obsolete equipment that it is practically impossible to use; we sell it, using the receipts to buy clothing and gear."⁵¹

The KR's 2007 draft defense budget earmarked funding for four power agencies: the Defense Ministry, the Border Service, the National Guard, and the Military Court—a total of \$25 million (988.9 million som), or 0.8 percent of GDP.⁵²

⁴⁶ See: Zh. Ibraliev, "V Kyrgyzstane vozrozhdauiu traditsii torzhestvennykh provodov prizyvnikov v armiu," *24.kg*, 17 October, 2006, available at [<http://www.24.kg/community/2006/10/17/8462.html>], 7 April, 2007.

⁴⁷ See: S. Kozhemyakin, op. cit.

⁴⁸ KR Government Resolution No. 144 of 6 March, 2006, On the KR Government Conclusion concerning the Draft Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Parliamentary Control over the KR Military Organizations.

⁴⁹ See: Zh. Ibraliev, "Parlament Kyrgyzstana odobril zakonoproekt o parlamentskom kontrole nad voyennymi organizatsiiami KR," *24.kg*, 11 January, 2007, available at [<http://www.24.kg/politic/2007/01/11/21471.html>], 10 April, 2007.

⁵⁰ See: L. Bondarets, "Vooruzhennoe stolknovenie 12 maia 2006 goda: uroki, vyvody, predlozhenia," *Otkrytyi Kyrgyzstan*, available at [http://www.open.kg/upload/express_analysis/bondarec.doc], 16 March, 2007.

⁵¹ A series of interviews, *Kak obespechit zashchitu granits Kyrgyzstana?* 5 June, 2006. An interview with K. Tynaliev.

⁵² The other four agencies—the National Security Service, the State Protection Service, the Interior Ministry Internal Troops, and the Ministry for Affairs of Civil Defense, Emergency Situations, and Elimination of Natural Disasters—are included in the "Public Order and Security" category (see: "Poiasnitelnaia zapiska k projektu biudzheta KR na 2007 god," KR Finance Ministry, available at [<http://www.minfin.kg/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=679>], 26 May, 2007.

Because the power structures are under financed, their training standards declined to the minimum; therefore, the servicemen's ability to perform missions assigned to them leaves much to be desired.

Apart from other things, military reform includes upgrading weapons and equipment. Kyrgyzstan's Armed Forces have not been reoutfitted since the declaration of independence. According to K. Tynaliyev, the budget does not earmark any funding for the acquisition of military equipment. Compared to Russia, where 40 percent of the defense budget goes to maintenance of the Armed Forces and 60 percent for the procurement of arms and equipment, the entire funding in the KR goes for maintenance.⁵³ His view is shared by D. Kozhobergenov, deputy chief of staff of the Border Service: "The 400 million som earmarked in the budget is only enough to pay wages and provide food to servicemen."⁵⁴

An insufficient supply of arms and military equipment leads to a substantial increase in expenditure in the event of emergency situations (for example, incursions by armed groups across the border) and impairs the effectiveness of military operations in general. In 1999, an extra \$4.5 million had to be spent on eliminating a group of international terrorists.⁵⁵

The lack of funds for the procurement and maintenance of arms and military equipment, military training, reservist training, etc., imminently weakens the Armed Forces' ability to perform their duties in defending the country. Therefore, it is essential to review matters relating to the effectiveness of the Armed Forces, a rational distribution of available resources, the required numerical strength and training of officers and enlisted personnel.

In addition to that, an appropriate scientific and research base in the security realm is also lacking. Conclusions that are made here are based on data provided by the Soviet or Russian military science, while such compilation is counterproductive. All of these factors—the two countries' territorial scale, geographic specifics, military-political goals, financial status, etc.—are as different as can be.

Yet another impediment to military reform is the lack of civilian control over the reform process. Since the republic has no experience in such transformations, the implementation of all measures and activities involved in reforming the Armed Forces as a whole has been entrusted to the Defense Ministry, which effectively closed all avenues to civilian oversight. Needless to say, military reform, both on the theoretical and practical level, is the domain of the state, above all the Defense Ministry, but not to the exclusion of other government agencies. For example, in Russia, the Public Council under the Defense Ministry is actively involved in developing new military doctrine.⁵⁶ It would be advisable to create scientific research centers to study military problems in the KR or to tap some of the existing research facilities. Some of the principal questions for research should be as follows: society's vision of the military of the future, the main goals of the military reform, and so on.

It is high time to review the existing legislative basis, primarily the military doctrine. The current doctrine was adopted in 2002, but it was developed earlier, in 2000. The document fails to take into account most of the recent developments—e.g., the deployment of two [foreign military] bases on the republic's soil,⁵⁷ periodic attacks on border posts, and changes that have occurred in the situ-

⁵³ A series of interviews, *Kak obespechit zashchitu granits Kyrgyzstana?* 5 June, 2006. An interview with K. Tynaliyev.

⁵⁴ Ibidem. An interview with D. Kozhobergenov, Chief of the Main Operations Department, deputy chief of staff of the Border Service, available at [http://www.open.kg/ru/blics_archive_2006/blics_border_security], 28 May, 2007.

⁵⁵ See: L. Bondarets, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ RF Defense Minister's Order No. 490 of 16 November, 2006, On the Formation of the Public Council at the RF Defense Ministry.

⁵⁷ The Manas air base of the U.S.-led antiterrorist coalition is located not far from Bishkek (established in 2001). The Kant air base of the Collective Security Treaty Organization is located in the town of Kant, 20 km from Bishkek (established in 2003).

ation in the region as a whole. Furthermore, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York have shown that the use of relatively small armed groups in the present day world can cause devastating consequences even for the great powers. All of that requires a review and a clarification of threats to KR security, a redefinition of the Armed Forces' functions, and developing new approaches toward military doctrine in such a small country as Kyrgyzstan.

C o n c l u s i o n s

Analysis of military reform in the KR shows that there are two opposite views of the problem at hand. The first view, which could be described as pessimistic, is as follows: "There is in effect no military reform. There are only assurances [from the government] that reform is underway, but little else."⁵⁸ The second view—optimistic—posits: "Military reform has begun and is moving full steam ahead."⁵⁹ It seems that the truth lies somewhere in between. During the aforementioned three stages, state policy with respect to the Armed Forces has undergone substantial change—from complete denial that the country needs Armed Forces to the realization that the state cannot survive without a robust military security system, especially in such a problem ridden region as Central Asia. But as one expert said, "for our Armed Forces to meet the requirements of the time, it is necessary that the state give them higher priority."⁶⁰ In addition to that, good teamwork by all agencies and departments in organizing a military security system is of the essence.

There are two principal components of military reform.

- The first, which can be conveniently described as "**internal reform**," involves changes that directly enhance the state's defense capability. These transformations include restructuring the Armed Forces, reoutfitting and modernization, professional training by taking the country's geographic specifics into account, and so on.
- The second component—"external reform," involves measures designed to boost the image of the Armed Forces. They pertain to the introduction of national military uniform, improvement of social infrastructure, resolution of housing and related problems, implementation of cultural and health oriented activities, etc. Needless to say, the two components are closely interconnected. Since the republic at present lacks sufficient financial resources, only the second component of military reform is being implemented. But for the national security system to operate smoothly and effectively, it is still necessary to implement the first component—i.e., "internal reform." Without that, external transformations alone will not improve the country's defense capability.

In conclusion, it should be noted that many of the problems in the KR Armed Forces are connected with the initial stage of the development of the republic's power agencies. The aforementioned measures and activities indicate that military reform in its classic understanding is only beginning to gain momentum. Today, Kyrgyzstan cannot afford to completely reoutfit the military and acquire

⁵⁸ A series of interviews, *Kak obespechit zashchitu granits Kyrgyzstana?* 5 June, 2006. An interview with Col. Iu. Pogrebniak (Ret.), available at [http://www.open.kg/ru/blics_archive_2006/blics_border_security], 26 May, 2007.

⁵⁹ E.g., an interview with KR Defense Minister I. Isakov (quoted from: Iu. Gruzdov, "U silnoi armii—krepkiye tyly," *MSN*, 4 October, 2005, available at [<http://www.msn.kg/ru/news/11834/>], 30 May, 2007); a news conference by M. Bekboev, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, first deputy defense minister of Kyrgyzstan (quoted from: "Armia sovershenstvetsia," *MSN*, 18 October, 2005, available at [<http://www.msn.kg/ru/news/11629/>], 31 May, 2007).

⁶⁰ A series of interviews, *Kak obespechit zashchitu granits Kyrgyzstana?* 5 June, 2006. An interview with K. Tynaliev.

modern arms and military equipment. On the other hand, the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces does not always directly depend on financial resources. Boosting the prestige of military service by improving social infrastructure (which is happening now) has an indirect impact on the state's defense capability.

But the key ingredients of success are full-scale funding, in-depth analysis of outstanding problems in the military, and the political will of the country's leadership. Time will show whether they will be in place.

REGIONAL POLITICS

**POST-SOVIET INTEGRATION
THROUGH THE PRISM OF
POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION
IN THE NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES**

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**Reintegration:
An Urgent Problem**

The integration processes in the republics that acquired their sovereignty after the collapse of the Soviet Union naturally became one of the main elements in the widespread transformation process going on in the geographical expanse now known as post-Soviet. This is turning regional integration into one of the most urgent problems in the study of the new processes and phenomena occurring in this region.

Indeed, if integration is to be successful, we will be dealing with an essentially new type of unification, that is, reintegration. If it fails, the united expanse will continue to disintegrate, whereby completely.

At the current stage, it is still impossible to draw foregone conclusions and make predictions about either the first or the second scenario. Both integration and disintegration processes are going on at the same time with different degrees of intensity in the so-called newly independent states (NIS).

Of particular interest is the Central Asian region, where the local, post-Soviet, and international factors influencing the political transformation of the NIS and, consequently, the nature of their partic-

ipation in the integration processes are concentrated. In turn, interpretation of the vitally important question for the NIS—what does sovereignty mean for them?—depends on this. However, this question is pertinent and just as significant for all the NIS in the post-Soviet expanse. So it is extremely important to study their political transformation and the effect this process is having on the fate of NIS integration. Ultimately, political transformation affects the nature of the integration processes and vice versa—the integration processes are influencing the nature of political transformation in the NIS.

From the very beginning of the era of independence, political science studies of the NIS invariably concentrated on the idea of post-Soviet reintegration. Many experts have studied the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which arose in place of the disintegrated U.S.S.R. Almost all the former Sovietological centers in the West have switched to CIS topics.

On the other hand, today, in the era of globalization, the phenomenon of regional integration unions is a graphic trend in international relations. There are many relevant examples: the EU, ASEAN, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, the UAE, and others. The NIS of the post-Soviet expanse face the same historical challenge, meaning “is integration to be or not to be?” This does not simply entail a review of interrelations, it is also a question of the place and destiny of these states in the globalizing world order.

Nation- and State-Building in the Post-Soviet Expanse

After the Soviet Union collapsed and the newly independent states acquired their sovereignty, they began experiencing a transformation process of unprecedented scope and content. It is still going on, encompassing political, economic, social, military, ideological, and other vital spheres of social and state life. In so doing, nation- and state-building is possibly the most important factor in this process.

Essentially all the NIS, particularly the Central Asian republics, have never been independent states. After 1991, the monolithic post-Soviet space found itself “divided” among fifteen state formations. Not only was the former Soviet polity divided; the former common Soviet national self-awareness of the people inhabiting this space also found itself divided.

G. Gleason, an American expert on Central Asia, points out that nations have a problem with self-identification. He writes that rural residents are inclined to identify themselves with a particular family, valley, or oasis, rather than with a larger national group.¹ The American political scientist gives an interesting description of the specific requirements needed to create a nation-state in Uzbekistan (which can be entirely applied to other NIS): In contrast to the typical model, Uzbekistan began to exist as a “state” before it became a nation. Uzbekistan’s statehood was created for political purposes by the new Bolshevik regime. This subsequently led to the development of Uzbek national awareness.² The same can be said for the other Central Asian countries as well.

The process of new state- and nation-building in the post-Soviet expanse is naturally accompanied by the corresponding ideological support. Essentially all the NIS are facing the problem of creating their own national ideology. Understanding the strong mobilizing force that ideology has, the leaders of the former Soviet republics endowed this process with a certain sacral meaning. The

¹ See: G. Gleason, “Uzbekistan: from Statehood to Nationhood?” in: *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. by I. Bremer, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 335.

² See: *Ibid.*, p. 334.

fact that they were all brought up in the ideologically overcharged political atmosphere of Soviet times and taught to resort to ideology and propaganda as tools of political mobilization also comes into play here. In this case, that experience was needed for nation- and state-building. Some NIS went as far as simply reanimating the Soviet ideological-propagandistic school, admittedly, readapted to the new conditions.

On the whole, there is a wide range of ideological phrases called upon to justify particular aspects of the states' domestic or foreign policy. They consist of conservative-nationalistic, imperial, and liberal-Western trends, including so-called pan-movements (for example, pan-Turanism, pan-Islamism, pan-Slavism, and others).

We will take a look at a few of them to illustrate the nature, content, and orientation of political transformation. Revival of the ideological trend "Eurasianism" is interesting (primarily in Russian scientific and political circles), whereby Eurasian conceptions adapted to the CIS were revived during the search for a new Russian national identity.

"The basic theme of Eurasianism," writes B.S. Erasov, "is drawing up principles of civilizational unity for northern Eurasia and defining the prospects for a future world structure in this region."³ It is true that Eurasia is distinguished by a high degree of "symbiosis" and diffusion of ethnic and confessional groups, a frequent manifestation of which is the so-called "symbiotic identity" and inter-marriages. It is also true that a characteristic trait of the ethnic structure of the Soviet state was the fact that in many national republics and regions of the Soviet Union, the titular ethnos did not constitute the majority of the population

All the same, the extent to which "symbiotic identity" could become a "trump card" for the Eurasians is still unclear. This identity disappeared in 1991, after revealing all of its affectation, even if we accept those who believe that the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable and natural. But if we believe the hypothesis that the collapse of the Union was affected and its identity intrinsic, then the latter has ceased to exist, since it was forcefully removed from the scene by Russia, the "keeper" of this identity.

At this point, we should pay attention to the fact that, unfortunately, contemporary Eurasians do not clarify the target of their ideology, that is, who, which countries and which nations should be encompassed by it. The thing is that national identity or, to be more precise, national self-determination, in the much narrower than the Eurasian meaning of this definition, became one of the main issues of political transformation and nation- and state-building in the post-Soviet countries. However, to all appearances, the neo-Eurasian movement is making claims to the entire CIS expanse. Meanwhile, the lack of clarity or, to be more precise, non-development of the geographic boundaries of Eurasianism shows that the Eurasians' (who are primarily acting in Russian scientific circles) ideological searches are incomplete or being carried out with great difficulty.

B. Erasov draws attention to the civilizational component of the Eurasian identity. When raising the question of compatibility between culture and technological development, he comes to the conclusion that Eurasia has currently encountered a new modernization challenge from the West. "In light of the growing influence of globalization, the former goals of Eurasianism are being transformed into the tasks of preserving the spiritual heritage and protecting the rights of the region's nationalities."⁴ It is obvious that neo-Eurasianism has acquired a slight anti-Western hues, but the latter will hardly serve as the basis for integration countries within the CIS space.

To all appearances, the NIS have perceived the "modernization challenge" of globalism/the West as a given fact and chosen not so much a defensive position regarding it, as a strategy for joining the

³ B.S. Erasov, "Sotsiokul'turnye i geopoliticheskie printsipy evraziystva," *Polis*, No. 5, 2001.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

global system of interrelations. They do not regard the task of preserving the spiritual heritage as something that opposes modernization.

The following conclusion is also interesting: "Using Eurasianism's potential as an ideology, spiritual trend, and real movement could remove the danger of the region becoming a 'no man's land' and of its economic potential turning into a 'prize economy' and object of technological use by the world financial community."⁵ This conclusion seems not only controversial from the viewpoint of the concept of danger, but also somewhat biased, as well as geopolitically unilateral. Let's explain this position. It is still unclear how this ideology will save the region from becoming a no man's land and being plundered by the world financial community. Will the post-Soviet sovereign states united within neo-Eurasianism stop cooperating with the IMF or EBRD and receiving loans or other financial assistance from them? Will these countries close themselves off from the world behind another Iron Curtain to prevent their economy from becoming a "prize?" And was not the economy of the Central Asian republics precisely that during the existence of the Soviet economy?

Prejudice, meaning the lack of objectivity and geopolitical unilateralism of the thesis regarding the use of Eurasianism as an ideology, spiritual trend, and real movement for opposing the world financial community, consists in the fact that Russia is somehow implicitly endowed with the function of defending these countries, since it is the bearer of the Eurasian doctrine, while itself building normal relations with the above-mentioned community.

Finally, the claim that the nucleus of the sociocultural system of Eurasianism is formed from Slavic and Turanic components, which intertwine and inspire each other, seems to be very important. I think one can agree with this postulate with some reservation. Indeed, the Slavic and Turanic components were the backbone, the so-called bonding element, of the Soviet community for many decades. But it is doubtful that the Slavic-Turanic union is the basic element in Eurasianism. This union was so easily destroyed by one of its halves when the three Slavic republics of the former Soviet Union took a self-willed approach to deciding the fate of the great power. It will not be easy to return the Turanic component to the former Slavic-Turanic union due to the changed geopolitical conditions (see below).

On the whole, the idea that the Eurasian community is a community of historical destiny confirmed by the vast continent's geographic characteristics is the central theme in all the arguments in favor of Eurasianism. It should be noted that this common historical destiny is largely due to colonization of the Caucasian regions, as well as of former Turkestan, by imperial rule. Today there is no longer any doubt about this. During the formation of national ideology in essentially all the NIS, the recent Soviet past (which apparently should be presented as Eurasian) is mercilessly criticized as a period of totalitarianism to which there is no return. The most interesting thing is that throughout the 15-year period of independence, the leaders of the CIS countries, as well as political scientists, have said very little about the historical community on which the Commonwealth should be based.

At the same time, all the arguments in favor of Eurasian unity of the NIS (if of course the Eurasian conception encompasses the entire CIS space) are refuted by the absence of unity in certain parts of the Commonwealth, in particular, Central Asia, which is even more homogeneous and pure in the sociocultural and civilizational respects than the Eurasian conglomerate. The serious problems facing the Central Asian community show that they still have a long way to go before forming a broader and more ethnically diverse Eurasian community.

In addition to Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus also adhered to the Eurasian doctrine. In some cases, the concept "Central Eurasia (CEA)" is offered instead of the definition "Central

⁵ Ibidem.

Asia.” For example, a so-called Eurasian vector has appeared and is gaining strength in Kazakhstan’s foreign policy. The credo of its representatives boils down to the following: “Kazakhstan geographically borders on Central Asia, but it is not a Central Asian country. We are a Eurasian state in which the influence of Europe and Western values as a whole is extremely strong. We are not another ‘-stan’ in the understanding of some politicians and journalists. Our historical references are not Saudi Arabia, but Norway, and such countries as South Korea and Singapore.”⁶ But a more penetrating analysis of this position shows that Kazakhstan’s Eurasianism is no more than a myth.⁷

Pan-Turanism is another ideological basis of nation- and state-building. It was not articulated in the political or scientific doctrine of any organization or political power in the way the Eurasian doctrine was articulated, for example. Nevertheless, elements of the pan-Turanic movement were manifested in the policy of several countries in the post-Soviet space. In fact, the announcement that a Central Asian Commonwealth would be created (December 1991) essentially envisaged a union of Turkic states. Uzbek President Islam Karimov even put forward the conception of “Turkestan—Our Common Home.”

Talking about political transformation in the context of nation- and state-building, it should be noted that recently the fate of democracy became an important issue in the scientific and political discourses about nation- and state-building, form of rule, and national ideology in essentially every NIS. An analysis of this issue is bringing us to the thought that there are no clear prospects for democracy in the post-Soviet expanse. In other words, democracy is far from guaranteed, not only due to the mistakes or conservatism of the political regimes and leaders of the countries in question, but also due to more profound historical and geopolitical processes. And all of this becomes clearer when we analyze the consequences of the collapse of the totalitarian super state.

“In a continental empire, it is impossible for only the metropolis to be democratized without affecting the colonies. Therefore, there is a direct link between democratization and the collapse of the empire; democratization poses a much greater danger to the unity of an imperial state and so, consequently, resistance to it is greater.”⁸

Talking about the nature of the political regimes that have arisen in the CIS states, D. Furman writes: “In all these countries (with the exception of Moldova), the same type of regimes of ‘imitation democracy’ are being established as in Russia, at the head of which a representative of the Soviet *nomenklatura* elite is placed. These are frequently the same people who headed the republics at the end of the Soviet era. These rulers are trying to hold onto their power and then pass it on to hand-picked heirs, using means that are not lawful, but simulated as being lawful and democratic—election campaigns in which the opposition does not have access to the electorate, falsification of election and referendum results, and so on. In so doing, they cannot count on support from Western countries, ...but they can always rely on full understanding and support from Russia and their fraternal CIS countries.”⁹

Russia

In fact, more than anything else, the state structure of the CIS’s support system proper—the Russian Federation—is experiencing the dramatic consequences of the collapse of the U.S.S.R. “Post-

⁶ D. Nazarbaeva, “Spetsifika i perspektivy politicheskogo razvitiia Kazakhstana,” *Bulletin*, No. 3, 2003. International Institute of Contemporary Politics, on the IICP site at [http://iimp.kz/index.php?action=show&art_id=150&from=5], 17 February, 2006.

⁷ See: F. Tolipov, “Central Asia is a Region of Five *Stans*. Dispute with Kazakh Eurasianists,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (38), 2006.

⁸ D. Furman, “Dolgiy protsess raspada rossiiskoi imperii,” in: *Tsentral’naia Azia i Iuzhnyi Kavkaz. Nasushchnye problemy*, ed. by B. Rumer, East Point, Almaty, 2006, p. 56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Soviet Russia is developing as an authoritarian political system, as a market economy in which the state has a prominent role to play, and as a Great Power with Slavophilic ideas in the ideological sphere.”¹⁰ Western experts also describe Russian policy as authoritarian, aimed at strengthening the role of the state and reinforcing the personal power of the president. They evaluate the form of rule as controlled democracy.¹¹

Russia is still a unique power in the post-Soviet space: the Russian state was the backbone of the Soviet Union and is still the nucleus of the CIS, while the Russian language has always been either the state means of communication (during the Soviet Union), or the interstate language of the Commonwealth. And today, of course, Russia’s spiritual, economic, and military-political revival can raise its prestige again, particularly in the so-called Near Abroad, and open up new opportunities for the Russian language as a means of communication between different nationalities.

Moscow’s support of the Russian-speaking population is an important ideological and political tool in nation- and state-building. Giving the Russian language the status of the official means of communication at the state level and among nationalities in several countries (for example, in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) meets Russia’s interests. There is a Government Commission for Compatriot Affairs Abroad in the higher echelon of power, it organizes assistance to schools where lessons are taught in Russian, increases enrolment for native citizens in Russia’s higher education institutions, and has developed an extensive program for supporting the latter. On the whole, activity in this sphere is progressing in two areas:

- rendering assistance to Russian-speaking citizens of the CIS states and protecting their rights;
- helping to resolve the problems of people who have moved to Russia and creating conditions for the compact settlement of Russians.

In this respect, Moscow is very worried about the personnel policy being carried out by the CIS countries and the trend toward ousting Russian-language specialists from the power structures, medical, educational, art, and cultural institutions. At present, Russia is objectively interested in even the indigenous residents of former Soviet republics migrating to its territory. At the same time, the Russian Federation is even more interested in consolidating the Russian population in places where it densely resides in the aforementioned countries.

At the same time, people in Russia believe that the numerous persistent challenges and threats throughout history from the west, south, and east brought the people from North Eurasia to Moscow, which largely determines their political, economic, defense, and behavioral orientation. This state of affairs, albeit with variations, will most likely be retained in the future. This is largely what is feeding the Kremlin’s desire to keep the post-Soviet community of nations in one piece, a desire which, according to many analysts (including Russian), is sometimes acquiring the form of a neo-imperial syndrome.

Yegor Gaidar, a prominent political figure in the Russian Federation, once noted: “Identifying state grandeur with imperial desires makes it difficult for the national conscience of the former metropolis to adapt to losing the status of a great power. Exploitation of the post-imperial syndrome is an effective way to gain political support. The conception of empire as a powerful state dominating over other nations is a product that is as easy to sell as Coca-Cola or Pampers. No intellectual effort is required to advertise it.”¹²

¹⁰ J. Eyvazov, «Geopolitical Lessons of the Post-Soviet Caucasus: Forward to Globalization or Back to Classical Eurasian Geopolitics?» *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (1), 2006, p. 36.

¹¹ See: P. Dunai and Z. Liakhovskiy, “Organizatsii i vzaimootnosheniia v evro-atlanticheskoi sisteme,” *SIPRI Annual-2004*.

¹² Ye. Gaidar, “Imperskaia missiia v Azii—vazhneishiy element natsional’noi samoidentifikatsii Rossii,” available at [www.centrasia.org], 15 June, 2006. (Source—*Vedomosti*.)

In this respect, Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent interview with the Al Jazeera Arabic television network is interesting. We will present one question the Russian leader was asked.

Question: Mr. President, you called restoration of Russia's territorial integrity one of the main results of your seven-year stint in power. Did you mean Chechnia?

V. Putin: I did not only mean Chechnia. I meant that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, centrifugal and centripetal trends naturally caused significant damage to state-building and the development of the new Russian state, and the foundations of the Russian state were undermined. These trends were out of sync, in many regions, both in national and in those where a primarily ethnic Slavic, Russian population resides, we saw different trends not only toward federalization, but toward overstepping rights within the framework of the federative state. It was precisely these trends that were stopped.¹³

Ukraine

Let us recall that this country refused to participate in the new Union. According to many local political scientists, Ukraine did not regard the CIS as an integration structure either—Kiev treated it as a form of “civilized divorce” of the former Soviet republics. The Ukrainian position looks justified against the background of the current crisis in the Commonwealth.

Head of the Main Service of Foreign Policy of the Secretariat of the Ukrainian President Konstantin Timoshenko, in turn, reminded everyone that the country has repeatedly stated its dissatisfaction with the way the CIS functions and the “activity of this organization in general.” After adding that Ukraine is reviewing its decision to withdraw from the Commonwealth, Timoshenko is nevertheless giving it one last chance: the numerous agreements signed within the CIS must begin to function. But if this does not happen, the republic will raise the “specific question about halting Ukraine's participation in this international organization.”¹⁴

The country inherited a powerful military-industrial complex and a relatively developed economy from the Soviet Union. This republic retained its membership in the U.N. even during the existence of the Union state. So, correspondingly, the national and political self-determination of the Ukrainians was expressed at rather a high level and in a developed form. Therefore, it is no accident that Ukraine is taking the lead, so to speak, among the post-Soviet NIS with respect to withdrawal from the CIS.

According to Ukrainian political scientists, today the state is in the midst of an inter-civilizational conflict, after finding itself in the role of a buffer between democratic Europe and undemocratic Russia. At present, the course Ukraine has chosen is becoming clear—membership in NATO. The republic is participating in the military campaign in Iraq as part of the international coalition forces, which is promoting, among everything else, gradual harmonization of its military standards with the European.

Many representatives of this state are explaining and justifying Ukraine's desire to join NATO and the EU as the Ukrainians' self-identification with European values and the democratic political system. In this way, Ukraine's political transformation is expressed not only in its distancing itself from any integration processes in the post-Soviet expanse, but also in its striving toward the European Union after 1991.

¹³ See: Interview with the Al Jazeera Arabic satellite television network, 12 February, 2007. (Source—InoSML)

¹⁴ A. Palkin, “SNG oboydetsia bez Ukrainy i Gruzii,” available at [www.centrasia.org]. (Source—Utro.Ru, 10 May, 2006.)

Belarus

Political transformation has been ambiguous in the republic since the time it declared its sovereignty. At the beginning of the 1990s, this state chose to be a parliamentary republic and conducted a relatively democratic policy. Later, when the post of president was introduced, his authoritative rule slowed down the country's democratic development.

The euphoria experienced by the country's independence from the former empire dissipated gradually and Belarus found itself in a difficult international and geopolitical position between Russia and Europe. Belarus always placed the priority in its foreign political and foreign economic activity on strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS countries. It is in favor of turning the Commonwealth into a regional organization with a high level of economic and political integration.

In December 1999, the presidents of Belarus and Russia signed a treaty in Moscow on creating a Union state, which came into force in January 2000. The document envisages further joint steps by both countries to harmonize and unite their legal, economic, financial, customs, and other systems, as well as form interstate power structures, which as a result could lead to the creation of a Union state.

The accelerated Belorussian-Russian *rapprochement* undermined the amorphous CIS and aroused suspicions in Belarus' neighbors. Within the country, it was accompanied by growing criticism and opposition from wide social circles and national-democratic forces.

Meanwhile, the authoritative rule of President Alexander Lukashenko was seriously criticized by several Western states, which placed the country in a certain amount of international isolation. On the whole, we can agree with the conclusion of Belorussian political scientist V. Snapkovskiy, who said that "the development experience of the Republic of Belarus in the second half of the 1990s shows the continuity of Belarus' domestic and foreign policy and the domestic and foreign factors of its functioning. This gives reason to presume that democratization of domestic political life will help the country to withdraw from its foreign political isolation."¹⁵

However, geopolitics, on the one hand, and economic interests, on the other, are still modifying the policy of the two allies. The "oil and gas conflict" that occurred between them in 2006 is clear evidence of this. Alexander Lukashenko's subsequent statement about his willingness to cooperate "even with a demon, even with the devil" in the West, for the sake of ensuring the energy security of his country, is symptomatic not only in the context of Russian-Belorussian interrelations. Be that as it may, the mentioned conflict between Moscow and Minsk revealed the obvious truth: if the union is economically unprofitable to even one of the sides, it will not happen, no matter how much you lament over lost "Slavic brotherhood" and other values that are too abstract for the post-Soviet generation of politicians.¹⁶

In this way, as we can convince ourselves, the specifics of the republic's political transformation and its attitude toward the integration projects in the post-Soviet space show that self-identification and foreign policy orientation are not as unequivocal as they may seem even for a pro-integration-minded state like Belarus, which is a close ally of Russia.

¹⁵ V. Snapkovskiy, "Vneshniaia politika Respubliki Belarus': pervye itogi pervogo desiatiletia," *Belorusskiy Zhurnal mezhdunarodnogo prava i mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii*, No. 4, 2000, available at [http://lib.ixbt.by/belarus/ixbt_readme.php?subaction=showfull&id=1096041141&archive=&start_from=&ucat=4&].

¹⁶ See: V. Zharkov, "Posle SNG. Postsovetskoe prostranstvo: konets istorii," *Prognosis.Ru*, 15 January, 2007.

Moldova

In an interview with *NG*, Andrey Stratan, the country's foreign minister, called the problem of unrecognized Transnistria the only obstacle in relations with Russia. This question is also being discussed in the "5+2" format (Moldova, Transnistria, Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE, as well as observers from the EU and U.S.).¹⁷

The following thesis from the draft of its foreign policy conception eloquently talks about the country's international orientations: "Moldova is recognized by the states of the world, it is a member of the U.N. and of its specialized structures, it belongs to the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, and it actively participates in regional and subregional cooperation associations, ICE, CIS, SECI, CEMN, the Danube Commission, and so on. Access to the Danube River will have a favorable effect on the development of river and sea transportation in the Republic of Moldova and will ensure its communication both with the countries of Central Europe and the Black Sea Basin, as well as with the Middle East states."

Based on the idea that in today's world, countries are consolidating around the large power poles, the mentioned conception says that "within the borders of the Old World, this pole is represented by the European Union, toward which the countries located in this zone are gravitating, including the Republic of Moldova." In addition, "membership or participation in interregional European organizations and initiatives, as well as joining the EU, also meets the security goals of the Republic of Moldova."

Moldova also believes that membership in the EU will help it to adapt to the globalization challenges: "Moldova can only deal with this problem by being part of a strong political and economic community, such as the EU; keeping in mind geographic and historical criteria, the Republic of Moldova is a country with a European culture and traditions."

In so doing, Moldova recognizes the immense importance of good relations with the Russian Federation: "Russia occupies first place in trade and economic relations with Moldova. Taking into account these close relations, as well as the fact that most of Moldovan society is made up of people who speak Russian, and keeping in mind Russia's political and economic significance in the international system, it remains one of Moldova's strategic partners."

Nevertheless, the country supports integration processes in the CIS: "The Republic of Moldova will carry out an active policy of efficient economic cooperation within the CIS, which is an important sales market for goods from Moldova and will remain a favorable field of further development of mutually advantageous relations with the CIS member countries in different spheres. Our country is in favor of cooperation based on the principles of equal rights and presumes the formation of a united economic space based on the principles of a market economy as an end goal."¹⁸

The Caucasian States

Azerbaijan has been in the focus of international attention due to its oil resources since the moment it acquired its independence. It is precisely this natural resource and the prospects for transporting it to the world markets that largely enabled the geopolitical processes in the Caucasian region to be restored. These also became important factors of the state's domestic progress. The country is placing

¹⁷ See: A. Zhelenin, "Moldavia integriruetia s Evropoi, a ne c Rumyniei," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 April, 2007.

¹⁸ *Kontsepsiia vneshnei politiki Respubliki Moldova*, available at [http://www.profitclub.md/consulting/readit/interactiv/2002_04/30_02.html].

great hopes on the imminent transportation of Azerbaijani oil via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the benefits this promises.

On the whole, this Caucasian republic is undergoing the same political transformation as the other post-Soviet states. Azeri analyst A. Iunusov notes three orientations in the country's political elite—pro-Western, pro-Russian, and pro-Iranian, which are competing with each other with varying success.¹⁹ Meanwhile, President Ilham Aliiev called the republic's integration into NATO one of the priority areas in Azerbaijan's foreign policy activity. To all appearances, the country's armed forces will be able to bring their standards into harmony with the Alliance's by 2015. In so doing, Turkey, a member of NATO bonded by close cultural ties with Azerbaijan, is willing to act as mediator in the reform of the Azerbaijani army.²⁰

Armenia, according to Armenian analyst Sergey Sarkisian, has found itself at the intersection of a whole series of large integration plans during the past few years, in particular:

- the Greater Middle East project;
- Russia's integration programs in the post-Soviet expanse and, in particular, the Single Economic Space (SES), CSTO, and EurAsEC;
- enlargement of the EU and application of the "Enlarged Europe—New Neighborhood" conception to the region.²¹

Armenian politician Tigran Torosian believes that for the three South Caucasian states—Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia—"there is no alternative to Euro-integration either with respect to development and a qualitative change in the standard of living or to the search for ways to resolve the conflicts in the region. The prospect of membership in the European Union will open up new and real possibilities for resolving the conflicts that are acceptable to both sides."²²

Georgia possibly experienced the most dramatic political transformation of all the NIS in the post-Soviet space, which was expressed in its attitude toward the integration processes. According to some theoreticians, the country can even be categorized as a so-called failed state.²³ Abkhazia and South Ossetia are formations on the republic's territory where their own institutions of statehood are developing, whereby many residents of these areas have already received Russian citizenship.

In November 2003, in Georgia, the so-called Color Revolution took place, the first in the post-Soviet space—the Rose Revolution, which brought the opposition headed by Mikhail Saakashvili to power. In the West, this revolution was evaluated as a precursor of dramatic democratic change. As we know, later similar Color Revolutions occurred in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. But in the CIS countries they were perceived as attempts inspired and supported by the West to overturn the existing governments. Nevertheless, according to some observers (including Georgian analysts), the republic seems to be recoiling from the democratic conquests and promises of the new government.²⁴

¹⁹ See: A. Iunusov, "Azerbaidzhan: integratsiia v evropeiskie struktury v svete vnutripoliticheskoi situatsii," in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, Spektr Strategic Analysis Center, Erevan, 2005, pp. 90-100.

²⁰ See: "Azerbaidzhan beriot kurs na integratsiiu v NATO," 19 March, 2007. (Source—[www.eurasianet.org].)

²¹ See: S. Sarkisian, "Vliianie nekotorykh aspektov novoi geopoliticheskoi situatsii na Armeniiu," in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, p. 101.

²² T. Torosian, "Evropeiskaia integratsiia—iskliuchitelnyy shans dlia resheniia problem Iuzhnogo Kavkaza," in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, p. 10.

²³ For more detail, see: M. Malek, "Primenenie teorii 'provalivshikhsia gosudarstv' na Iuzhnom Kavkaze v kontekste evropeiskogo proekta," in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, pp. 50-59.

²⁴ See: Sh. Pichkhadze, "Gruziia posle noiabria 2003 goda: dostizheniia i tendentsii," in: *Iuzhnyy Kavkaz kak chast' Bol'shoi Evropy*, pp. 79-89.

As for its foreign policy orientation, Georgia is essentially one of the first CIS countries to openly move toward integration with the European Union. Well-known Georgian analyst and diplomat Alexander Rondeli believes that it is Tbilisi's strategic goal to integrate into the Euro-Atlantic and European structures. "Becoming a Russian satellite would mean that Georgia would lose its historical opportunity to build a contemporary democratic nation and state, that is, it would lose its national perspective."²⁵

A. Rondeli claims that it is just as strategically important for Russia to remain in Georgia, so the Russian Federation is putting constant pressure on the latter. He presents a whole series of advantages that control over Georgia gives Russia—beginning with creating a barrier in the south to fend off Turkey's influence and obtaining access to Azerbaijan's rich energy resources, and ending with its military presence in the Black Sea and the possibility of having an influence on the Middle East countries.²⁶

At an international conference held in Vilnius devoted to cooperation of the Baltic and Black Sea states, Mikhail Saakashvili again touched upon the topic of withdrawing from the CIS. "The example of Lithuania shows that, after leaving the CIS, Tbilisi will not fall by the wayside," he notes.²⁷ In this way, Georgia's political transformation and foreign policy orientation have become the strongest upheavals for the Commonwealth.

On the other hand, the absolute majority of Russians regret that the Soviet Union fell apart, which is regularly confirmed during public opinion polls. And they lament over this not because they are nostalgic for communism, but because they no longer have any confidence in the future or in the safety of their own lives. They do not share the almost unanimous opinion of the West that the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitable due to the U.S.S.R's fatal congenital defects. Instead they believe, and not without justification, that the country's collapse was caused by three subjective factors:

- 1) Gorbachev's political and economic reforms;
- 2) the power struggle, during which Yeltsin destroyed the Soviet state in order to get rid of its president, Gorbachev; and
- 3) the seizure of property by the Soviet official elite, or *nomenklatura*, which was more interested in privatizing the nation's huge fortune in 1991 than in protecting it.²⁸

In conclusion, let us turn to Gorbachev. He wrote the following about the Soviet people: "If the national question had not essentially been resolved in the country, there would have been no Soviet Union ... in the social, cultural, economic, and defense respects. Our state would not have survived if there had been no essential leveling out of the republics, if a community had not arisen based on fraternity, cooperation, respect, and mutual assistance."²⁹

²⁵ A. Rondeli, "Russia and Georgia: Relations are Still Tense," *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (1), 2006, p. 69.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ A. Palkin, op. cit.

²⁸ See: S. Cohen, "The Breakup of the Soviet Union Ended Russia's March to Democracy," *The Guardian*, 13 December, 2006.

²⁹ M. Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie dlia nashey strany i dlia vsego mira*, Political Literature Publishers, Moscow, 1988, p. 118.

THE DEGREE OF FEDERAL INFLUENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT VECTOR OF THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC

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The Chechen Republic is going through a difficult historical period in its development. A retrospective analysis of the nature of this process shows a clear correlation between the policy of the Federal Center and the vector of Chechnia's sociopolitical development.

The current state of affairs in the Chechen Republic results in large part from its tragic past. In studying the republic's development, it is necessary, in my opinion, to examine three periods in their interconnection, because such an approach helps to gain a better understanding of the philosophy of its evolution. The Soviet period in the development of Chechnia was marked by great excesses in the national policy of the Union Center toward the republic. The starting point here was the absolutely monstrous deportation of entire peoples from their historical homeland in 1944. When the Chechens were allowed to return in 1957, their integration into peaceful constructive life in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was a slow and painful process. This had a particularly adverse effect on the work of government bodies and economic management agencies. Until 1989 (that is, almost until the end of the Soviet period), not a single representative of the titular nationality had ever been elected as head of the regional Communist Party committee. Ethnic Chechens met with artificial barriers limiting their opportunities to work in a number of key ministries, departments and associations; they were never appointed to senior posts. A similar situation existed in higher and secondary education institutions in the republic.

In the Soviet period, the economy of the Chechen-Ingush Republic was mostly based on the petrochemical complex. In the 1980s, industrial production had the leading place, accounting for 57% of the republic's total output; agriculture contributed 17.8%, construction, 15.5%, and infrastructure sectors, 9.3%. The main role in industry was played by the fuel and energy complex, whose share in 1988 was 45.7% of commercial output and 67% of fixed assets.

The Soviet period in the republic was marked by the development of large and highly productive deposits, and also by their intensive exploitation designed to maximize current revenue. This resulted in rapid depletion of reserves and mounting environmental problems, which led to a shortening of active development periods and to a premature decline and "winding down" of mineral production in many areas. This process gathered momentum in the republic in the 1960s-1980s. The average period of active development of oil-producing regions in Russia is around six years.

Foreign experience shows that active field development in the oil and gas sector in many countries and regions is lengthened by means of moderate rates of extraction (primarily at major fields) and capacity reservation. For onshore oil fields, the rate of development is usually close to 2% of original recoverable reserves. That is why the active development period for many foreign oil-producing regions is dozens of years. A moderate extraction rate makes it possible not only to lengthen this period, but also to minimize costs and, consequently, to increase the profitability of oil and gas production.

An analysis of the development of the republic's social sphere in the 1980s shows that in terms of all key parameters it steadily ranked very low in the Northern Caucasus economic region and in the Russian Federation as a whole. This is explained by the total subordination of the autonomous republic's key industries to central departments (75% of all enterprises were under Union jurisdiction, and 22%, under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation), by the fact that the republic's interests were ignored in the process of distribution of its industrial income between it and the Union Center, and by the absence of a considered policy regarding the location of production, diversification of the economy, development of the social sphere, protection of the population's interests, etc. As a result, the value of non-productive fixed assets per capita (in actual prices) in the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic in 1987 was 2,015 rubles, i.e., the republic ranked next to last in the Northern Caucasus economic region and 72nd in the Russian Federation. In terms of another parameter—capital investment by state enterprises and organizations in the non-productive sphere per 1,000 population—in 1987 the republic ranked last in the Northern Caucasus and 73rd in the Russian Federation (with 572 thousand rubles).

The development of the republic's social infrastructure in that period had a specific character: it was mostly created by industrial production personnel and serviced them, and also employees of state institutions located in Grozny. The proportion of Chechens in these institutions was insignificant in view of the above-mentioned artificial restrictions imposed on the titular nationality in matters of government employment. In rural areas, mostly inhabited in that period by Chechens, social services were at an extremely low level; many rural communities in the republic did not even have a direct bus service to Grozny. At that time, there was a paradoxical situation in the Northern Caucasus economic region: the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic, which had the most powerful economy in the form of its industry, in terms of many social indicators ranked last not only among the territories of this region, but also among all subjects (constituent entities) of the RSFSR, whereas another administrative-territorial unit of the same economic region—North Ossetia—with an economy constituting a fraction of the Chechen economy ranked third among all RSFSR subjects in terms of the same social indicators.

In my opinion, the above-listed components of the previous period had a decisive influence on the vector of Chechnia's development in post-Soviet times.

During the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. in 1990 and 1991, many Union and some autonomous republics (including the Chechen-Ingush Republic) declared their state sovereignty. In the period from 1991 to 1994, the economy of the Chechen Republic developed as an enclave because its new leadership and the Federal Center failed to find a Pareto optimal solution in their mutual relations. As a result, the Chechen economy was gradually sliding into a slump. One can say that with the start of military operations in the republic (in December 1994), its industrial economy ceased to exist. After the "first Chechen war," the republic was left virtually without any industry or other key sectors of the economy. In the period between the two wars (1996-1999), Chechnia had a primitive economy. At that time, there were no serious investments in the republic for many reasons, but primarily due to the absence of real steps to implement the basic agreements achieved between the Chechen Republic and the Russian Federation in 1997. Two military campaigns in the republic's territory in the course of six years caused irreparable damage both to its economy and to its citizens.

In early 2000, the republic lapsed into gloomy pessimism: many of its inhabitants lost faith in the very possibility of a normal life in Chechnia similar to that in other, stable regions of the Russian Federation. Public opinion was coming to the conclusion that the republic's territory and its population were being used by various international forces to achieve their geopolitical goals in the Caucasus. Tired of uncertainty and arbitrary rule, people were hurriedly leaving Chechnia in search of a peaceful place to live in. The Interim Administration of the Chechen Republic, headed by N.P. Koshman, and some Federal agencies thought it impossible to restore Chechnia's capital, the city of Grozny. The

State Institute of Urban Design (GIPROGOR) developed its version of the capital's General Plan, and its director M.Iu. Grudinin presented this plan at various events. According to that document, the old city was not to be restored, but a new one was to be built to the east of it, with two or three-storey houses. That version of the capital's General Plan provided for a maximum population of 250 thousand. The Plan did not stand up to criticism even in the eyes of the average citizen: the locals aptly called it a "barrack system."

When Akhmad Kadyrov was appointed head of the Administration of the Chechen Republic, he revised the opinion of the former leadership on the capital's future. Having studied the General Plan of the republic's chief city as proposed by GIPROGOR, he came to the conclusion that it was unacceptable from the standpoint of the republic's development prospects and expressed his desire to restore the capital in the old place with the construction of 18-storey buildings meeting modern architectural standards.

Since 2005, after the appointment of Ramzan Kadyrov as acting Chairman of the Government of the Chechen Republic, he started implementing Akhmad Kadyrov's plans. Since then, a great deal has been done in the republic to restore housing and social facilities, and also elements of the social infrastructure destroyed during military operations. Moreover, much is being done to create some components of the social sphere in population centers where they were absent throughout the entire period of Soviet power.

It has been declared, this time at the Federal level, that all the consequences of the war should be fully eliminated by 2010, so that the republic could eventually develop as an ordinary subject of the Russian Federation.¹

But this task cannot be accomplished without a fundamental review of the policy pursued by the Federal Center in the Chechen Republic (if it is not interpreted too narrowly). In a limited sense, the elimination of all the consequences of military operations can be understood as a restoration of the housing, social facilities and social infrastructure elements destroyed in the course of the two wars. This task can be accomplished in the specified period, given consistent Federal financing of rehabilitation works in the said areas. The republic's own material participation in this process will be very limited in view of its small budget. With this approach to rehabilitation, the basis—Chechnia's economy—is left out of the process. Today the republic's economy is virtually nonexistent, while its backbone—the petrochemical complex—has in effect been destroyed. Unfortunately, nothing has been said to date about the creation of a Chechen economy that would meet modern requirements. So, at this stage it is too early to talk about a proper regeneration of the republic and its integration into the single socioeconomic space of the Southern Federal District (SFD) and the Russian Federation as a whole.

The Federal Center, in our opinion, has not yet drawn any objective conclusions from its past socioeconomic policy in the Chechen Republic. The method of keeping regions within the loyalty zone by means of excessive financial dependence on the Federal Center is extremely ineffective and strategically erroneous (in the conditions of information openness). Today it is highly important to make a correct assessment of the Federal Center's true interests in the regions. In pursuing its regional policy, the Center should know and take into account the experience of countries with developed federalism.

At the present stage in the development of the Russian state, a task of great current importance is the establishment in Chechnia and other heavily subsidized RF regions of a modern economy based on the principles of developed federalism. With its current financial capacity, the Federal Center is quite capable of accomplishing this task within a short period.

¹ See: Russian economic publication *Valovoi vnutrennii produkt* (Moscow), No. 19, 2006, p. 12.

The experience of federal countries (including domestic experience) suggests that it is impossible to achieve sociopolitical stability in a region or to integrate it into the country's single socioeconomic space unless an economy matching the basic country-average characteristics is created in this region. Empirical observations show a stable correlation between these two factors.

In recent years, the Chechen Republic has been over-subsidized: in 2007, grants from the Federal budget amounted to 24,385,965.8 thousand rubles, or over 90% of the republic's consolidated budget revenue.²

Today the Federal Center has set itself the goal of increasing its own revenue in the budgets of subsidized regions by broadening their tax base. However, in our opinion, this goal cannot be achieved without the Center's active participation in the development of the economy of these regions and a review of current arrangements for sharing tax revenue between various budget levels in favor of the regions (with due regard for the successful experience of other countries). Until these problems are resolved, Russia's subsidized regions will remain in the zone of sociopolitical instability and, consequently, will be unattractive for direct investment. Such a development vector will perpetuate the backwardness of the country's heavily subsidized regions, as is evident from their basic characteristics over the past ten years.

The Federal Center can achieve the above goal in Chechnia by resolving—in the true interests of the country and the republic—the following problems:

1. Accelerated creation in Chechnia of full-fledged modern market institutions, primarily a territorial institution of the Bank of Russia, a customs service and a stock market (with due regard for positive domestic and world practice).
2. Urgent steps to redefine the status of the republic's industry in its favor. Without such a decision it is impossible to properly restore Chechnia's industry, which means there is little chance of integrating it into the single socioeconomic space of the SFD and Russia as a whole. Without such a decision it is also impossible to change its status of an over-subsidized region, which means that the republic can hardly be turned into an attractive investment destination. When the oil sector is transferred to the jurisdiction of the Chechen government, it will be necessary to reorganize the oil industry and create a Chechen Petroleum Corporation (CPC) in order to coordinate the activities of all enterprises in this industry. This should lead to a centralization of oil sales and an increase in the republic's market competitiveness. The CPC's priority tasks should include an expansion and modernization of the petrochemical industry as part of the reconstruction effort and formulation of a strategy for the development of the oil industry. The CPC should create its own network for the distribution, marketing and retail sale of refined oil products both in Russian regions and in CIS countries. In formulating a comprehensive strategy for the development and modernization of the republic's petrochemical complex, it is necessary to study and take into account the relevant experience of other countries and regions, primarily Kuwait³ and the Republic of Tatarstan.
3. Creation of new industries to diversify economic development and provide the population with alternative employment opportunities. This should be done in order to reduce the republic's dependence on oil revenues. A special place could be assigned to the extraction of commercial complex ores and rare metals and organization of mining enterprises on this basis, and also to the development of the hydropower industry with the most effective use of the republic's hydropower potential in order to reduce electricity costs for producers and consumers. At this stage, the government of the Chechen Republic could make a proposal to the

² See: *Zakon Chechenskoi Respubliki o respublikanskom biudzhete na 2007 god*, Grozny, 2007.

³ See: *The Middle East and North Africa*, London, 1993, pp. 380-756.

Federal government validating the possibility and necessity of moving certain high-technology lines of industrial production from northern Russia to Chechnia in order to enhance their competitiveness in the foreign market. The possibility of such relocation can be motivated by the fact that the south of Russia is just the geographic and natural climatic zone that makes it possible to compete with Western states in this area. Other arguments that could be used to justify this proposal include the existence in the republic of a significant contingent of relatively cheap but highly skilled labor and a fairly large domestic market for the sale of the resulting products.

4. Advance development of a proper economic infrastructure as required by modern society. Priority should be given to the following elements of such an infrastructure:
 - all kinds of communications—both within the republic and with the outside world—meeting world standards (telecommunications, railways, roads, airlines, power grids, oil and gas pipelines, water supply systems, etc.);
 - material and technical base for health care, education and science.

In the conditions of market competition between the country's regions, the Federal Center should resolve, within a short period, such problems as the MegaFon mobile operator's monopoly position in Chechnia, the granting of international status to the republic's airport, and the opening of a motor road between the Chechen Republic and the Republic of Georgia. In view of these unresolved problems and the lack of a full-scale customs service in the republic's territory, its economy continues to suffer huge losses. This is evident from the fact that transportation in the Chechen Republic makes virtually no contribution to the gross regional product (GRP), whereas in the Krasnodar Territory its share in GRP is 18%.⁴

5. Development and strengthening of integration ties with other Russian regions. This task can be accomplished under the following conditions:
 - the Federal Center, with the direct participation of the presidential plenipotentiary representative in the Southern Federal District, resolutely eliminates all the artificial barriers between the territories of the SFD in order to create a single SFD market, and also in the interests of all constituent entities of the SFD and the state as a whole;
 - the Federal Center organizes constant monitoring of the state of affairs in the area of transit between the SFD territories at the district level;
 - based on the results of such monitoring, the Federal Center takes expeditious steps to prevent violations in any SFD territory.

This will markedly intensify economic activity in the SFD and promote the integration of its constituent entities into a single regional market. More effective use will be made of existing productive resources and of the entire potential of this macro region.

6. Intensive development of high-technology industries and the service sector in the broad sense of the term, with due regard for the republic's potential, the experience of developed countries and world economic trends. Special emphasis should be placed on progress in the field of recreation and tourism. In these areas, it is necessary to create, as a matter of priority, an institutional and infrastructure base (with the active participation of the Federal Center).

⁴ See: V.Ie. Yemelianov, "Iuzhny federalny okrug: sovremennoie sostoianie i problemy razvitiia," *Vneshneekonomicheskie sviazi*, No. 9, 2004.

If desired, the RF government will be able to find the financial resources required to carry out the above-listed measures. With the development of the service sector in accordance with the needs of the market economy, employment in this sector will considerably increase.⁵ This will involve qualitative changes in the structure of the service sector and an extension of the range of services. Well-thought-out and consistent improvements in this area will help to resolve, with the participation of the Federal Center, two major problems facing the Chechen Republic: to reduce unemployment and improve the people's quality of life.

7. Development of the republic's international cooperation and an increase in the share of foreign economic activity in GRP. In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to create modern institutional and infrastructure conditions for promoting the republic's foreign economic initiative with the Federal Center's active participation. The latter should help Chechnia—methodologically and organizationally—to establish direct foreign economic relations with the outside world (with due regard for the experience of civilized countries). As a result, the republic's share in the foreign economic activity of the Russian Federation will increase, and this area will have a key place in the Chechen economy. Today the Chechen share in the total volume of Russian foreign economic practice is close to zero. The development of the republic's foreign economic activity to a proper level will give a powerful impetus to innovative processes and diffusion of innovations throughout its territory.

However, the republic cannot accomplish these tasks in the foreseeable future through its own efforts (either politically or economically) in view of its extremely limited resources. From this it follows that success or failure in the achievement of the goal set by the Federal Center—to increase its own revenue in the budgets of subsidized regions by expanding their tax base—in the case of Chechnia depends entirely on Russia itself.

So, the degree of the Federal Center's influence on the development vector of the Chechen Republic has not diminished (and may have even increased) compared to the Soviet period.

⁵ See: *Regional Economic Performance within the European Union*, Ed. by K. Button and E. Pentecost, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 1999.

MASS MEDIA

**FRAMING THE TURKMENBASHI:
WESTERN PRESS PORTRAYALS OF
THE LATE PRESIDENT OF
TURKMENISTAN**

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Statement of the Problem

Studies have found that U.S. and other Western news media now devote less newspaper space, airtime, and financial and staff resources than in the past to foreign news, particularly news unrelated to ongoing wars in which the United States is engaged. That means more competition among “foreign” stories to get into print or onto the air, with editors and news directors exercising their professional judgment in selecting among competing offerings. With novelty among the widely accepted standard news values, it is no surprise that a story about a quirky foreign ruler such as the late president of Turkmenistan, or unusual law or governmental policy may edge out more “serious” stories in that competition for attention.

Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov, who died on 21 December, 2006, clearly fit the definition of a quirky, idiosyncratic, and authoritarian ruler. This study examines how three Western news organizations framed Niyazov during a one-year period and how they reported to their readers and audiences about Turkmenistan, specifically the prevalence of personal references to, and personalizing terminology about, the self-described “Turkmenbashi.” Finally, it discusses the im-

plications of such media framing for Western understanding of Turkmenistan and its issues, and the consequence that readers lose the opportunity to become informed about serious public policy issues that may directly or indirectly affect them and their own country in such matters as economics, security, politics, human rights, public health, energy, the environment, development, and religious and cultural movements.

Turkmenistan: Problems and Resources

Despite its potential wealth as a petro-state from natural gas and oil reserves, the country faces major economic, social, and health problems. According to a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency assessment, "Overall prospects in the near future are discouraging because of widespread internal poverty, a poor educational system, government misuse of oil and gas revenues, and Ashgabad's unwillingness to adopt market-oriented reforms."¹ The secretive nature of the government has made it tough to accurately gauge such challenges, however; N. Badykova observed, "It is difficult to assess Turkmenistan's economic situation. Official statistics are inflated two-three times to glorify (the) existing regime. The overall fiscal position of (the) Government is unknown because much of its revenue and expenditure is challenged through extra-budgetary funds and off-budget accounts."² In their study of the country's energy exports, V. Ginsburg and M. Troschke referred to an "information vacuum" that created contradictory opinions about the national economy, including conflicts between official and international organization statistics.³ There have been economic repercussions, such as the World Bank's refusal to provide new loans because the country has failed to report its external debt and meet minimum public resource management standards; in fact, the World Bank acknowledged that "unfortunately, there is little to show in terms of results" from loans and policy advice it previously provided.⁴ And N. Graham noted that the country has made only a limited departure from its "old, centrally planned economy" of the Soviet era.⁵

More than money is at stake. Badykova wrote, "Under the current irrational and corrupt political system, Turkmenistan's rich energy resources are more a curse than a blessing. Turkmenistan's high income from its gas exports permits its government to remain aloof from international organizations, to completely ignore the need for reforms and to isolate the country from the rest of the world."⁶ R. Burnashev and I. Chernykh said the country follows the premise that its main military danger comes from possible local wars and armed conflicts in neighboring countries, while Turkmenistan is involved in disputes with its neighbors over water-sharing (Uzbekistan), land borders (Kazakhstan), and Caspian Sea oilfields and seabed (Azerbaijan).⁷

¹ "Turkmenistan," in: *The World Factbook 2007*, Central Intelligence Agency, available at [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html].

² N. Badykova, "The Turkmen Economy: Challenges and Opportunities," Paper presented at Turkmenistan Workshop, Oxford, England, 18 June, 2004.

³ See: V. Ginsburg, M. Troschke, "The Export of Turkmenistan's Energy Resources, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (24), 2003, pp. 108-117.

⁴ See: "Turkmenistan Country Brief 2005," World Bank, available at [http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/TURKMENISTANEXTN/0,contentMDK:20631627~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:300736,00.html], 2006.

⁵ See: N.A. Graham, "Introduction and Overview," in: *The Political Economy of Transition in Eurasia: Democratization and Economic Liberalization in a Global Economy*, ed. by N.A. Graham and F. Lindahl, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, MI, 2006, pp. 1.

⁶ N. Badykova, op. cit.

⁷ See: R. Burnashev, I. Chernykh, "Turkmenistan's Armed Forces: Problems and Development Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (22), 2003, pp. 32-41.

Turkmenistan's extensive environmental problems include agrichemical contamination of soil and groundwater, salinization, pollution of the Caspian, desertification, biodiversity loss, water-logged soil caused by poor irrigation practices; dam construction, and diversion of the Amur Darya for irrigation, diverting the river from the Aral Sea.⁸ Many of those problems have severe public health and economic consequences as well. And the first major research into the health of the populace found life expectancy to be 62, lower than any other Central Asian or European country, and concluded that its health care system is inadequate even by Central Asian standards.⁹

By all objective measures from academic observers and independent groups, Turkmenistan is a repressive society with no official regard for human and political rights. The country's violations of press, religious, speech, political, and travel rights have been under steady criticism by foreign governments, multinational agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. For example, the U.S. State Department bluntly described it as an authoritarian, one-party state that Niyazov dominated until his death, with a poor record on human rights, attacks on journalists by security forces, constraints on Internet access, phony criminal charges against political dissidents, abuse of adherents of minority religions, and fraudulent elections.¹⁰ The NGO Freedom House rated the country as "not free," with the lowest score on political rights and civil liberties among the five Central Asian republics and cited the secretive nature of the government, widespread corruption in the educational system, and a "continuing Soviet-style command economy," among other systemic problems.¹¹ The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked it among the "worst places to be a journalist" due to governmental control over newspapers and broadcast stations, self-censorship by editors and reporters, and especially harsh treatment of "the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), which has maintained an informal network of correspondents (and) has been the nation's only alternative source of news and information."¹² In September 2006, RFE/RL Turkmen Service correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova died in custody, although authorities attributed her death to natural causes.

The media representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has criticized Turkmen television for using "Stalinist" propaganda methods to "humiliate and destroy individuals" who allegedly attacked Niyazov.¹³ Amnesty International's 2005 report found widespread human rights abuses and harassment of religious minorities and civil society activists, noting, "Small steps to fend off criticism of the country's human rights record failed to adequately address concerns raised by human rights groups and intergovernmental bodies."¹⁴

There is little reason to expect major human rights improvements in the near future, despite Niyazov's death. His successor, Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, was a Niyazov aide and deputy chairperson of the Council of Ministers and, thus, closely wed to the repressive policies of the past. Five months after his February 2007 election, Eurasianet¹⁵ reported, "If anything, it seems as if the

⁸ See: A. Carius, M. Feil, D. Tanzler, *Addressing Environmental Risks in Central Asia: Risks, Policies, Capacities*, United Nations Development Program, Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 2003.

⁹ See: A. Lichtarowicz, "Concerns over Turkmen Health Care," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 3 June, 2005.

¹⁰ See: "Turkmenistan," in: *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices—2006*, U.S. Department of State, available at [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78845.htm], 6 March, 2007.

¹¹ See: *Freedom in the World 2007*, Freedom House, Washington, DC, available at [http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&country=7292&year=2007], 2007.

¹² *Attacks on the Press 2006*, Committee to Protect Journalists, New York, available at [http://cpj.org/attacks06/europe06/turk06.html], 2007.

¹³ "OSCE Media Representative Blasts 'Stalinist' Propaganda Methods on Turkmen TV," Press release, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 16 January, 2003.

¹⁴ *Amnesty International Report 2005*, Amnesty International, available at [web.amnesty.org/report2005/tkm-summary-eng], 2005.

¹⁵ See: "Turkmenistan: The Personality Cult Lives on, Residents Take It in Stride," *Eurasianet*, 11 July, 2007.

country's new leader ... is simply replacing Niyazov as the chief object of the cult's affection." It noted that his portrait "has already replaced Niyazov's on state television news broadcasts," and said that displays marking Berdymukhammedov's 50th birthday, including the minting of gold coins with his portrait, "confirmed what many outside observers had suspected: the cult of personality—and centralized, one-man rule—seems destined to remain a dominant feature of public life in Turkmenistan for the foreseeable future." As recently as 17 July, the executive director of the International Helsinki Federation of Human Rights said independent human rights groups still cannot work openly there.¹⁶

The Turkmenbashi

There is no doubt that Niyazov ranked among the world's most overtly idiosyncratic autocrats. A brief BBC biography¹⁷ gave these basics: Born in 1940, Turkmen Communist Party chief in 1985, president since independence in 1991, and president-for-life by act of the Mejlis, the impotent national legislature, since 1999. NGOs have decried the personality cult he developed, including his assumption of the title Turkmenbashi, which means "father of the Turkmen people." D. Burghart wrote that Turkmenistan "evolved into an autocracy that bends to the every whim of the ruler" and that his regime's "sole concern appears to be its own self-perpetuation."¹⁸ As the NGO Human Rights Watch commented, "The perverse cult of personality around President Niyazov dominates public life and the education system."¹⁹

He had a reputation for bluntness. For example, after a 2002 assassination attempt, he characterized his alleged assailants as "a bunch of people who went mad from being too well off. They have reached the highest levels of debauchery, they use drugs, heroin... Who is a traitor? Only somebody who has gone mad."²⁰ His first book, *Rukhnama*,²¹ is compulsory reading in school and university curricula, mosques and preschools.²² It features a color photo of Niyazov and the caption, "the president for a life of independent and neutral Turkmenistan" with his views on topics ranging from Islam to history to war to patriotism to prosperity to individual rights to education to morality to the role of women. The Russian news agency ITAR-TASS described it as "the 'holy book,' which is worshipped in the Central Asian republic not less than the Koran."²³ A sequel was published in 2004.

Niyazov fit the definition of the leader of a "Big Man" regime in which a single person is enshrined as a "Great Leader," as do the leaders of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, who, as E. Merry wrote, "intend to remain in personal control indefinitely."²⁴

¹⁶ See: "Rights Group Says Repressive Turkmen Policies Unchanged," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 10 July, 2007.

¹⁷ See: "Country Profile: Turkmenistan," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, available at [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1298497.stm], 2006.

¹⁸ D.L. Burghart, "In the Tracks of Tamerlane: Central Asia's Path to the 21st Century," in: *In the Tracks of Tamerlane: Central Asia's Path to the 21st Century*, ed. by D.L. Burghart, T. Sabonis-Helf (pp. 3-21), National Defense University, Washington, DC, 2004, p. 15.

¹⁹ "Turkmenistan: Human Rights Concerns for the 61st Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights," Human Rights Watch, available at [hrw.org/english/docs/2005/03/10/turkme10300.htm], 2005.

²⁰ "OSCE Media Representative Blasts 'Stalinist' Propaganda Methods on Turkmen TV."

²¹ See: S. Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*, Ashgabad, 2003.

²² See: S. Ingram, "Turkmen Live by Leader's Book," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 29 May, 2002.

²³ "New *Rukhnama* by Turkmen Leader Saparmurat Niyazov Read to Turkmenistan's Parliament," ITAR-TASS, 24 August, 2004.

²⁴ E.W. Merry, "Politics of Central Asia: National in Form, Soviet in Content," in: *In the Tracks of Tamerlane: Central Asia's Path to the 21st Century*, p. 32.

The Western press has reported on and, in effect, ridiculed Niyazov and his initiatives in recent years, starting before the period covered by this study and including stories about his death on 21 December, 2006. Among them were Niyazov's order to temporarily remove most of his "all-pervasive" portraits from public buildings in Ashgabad and place an awning over his 5-meter (16-foot) statue in front of the parliament building during the May 2004 visit by Western ambassadors²⁵; his "don't praise me" request to government officials in June 2004; and his personal unveiling of the world's largest handmade carpet called "the 21st Century: The Epoch of the Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi."²⁶

Theoretical Considerations

News Judgment

Journalists are "gatekeepers" who individually and collectively determine what topics and specific stories are or are not covered, how much space in print or time on the air that stories receive, and how prominently those stories appear within a publication or broadcast. They do so through the exercise of editorial judgment about newsworthiness, which includes such factors as timeliness, proximity, and impact, as well as novelty.²⁷ A host of other factors also influence their judgment including perceived or actual audience interest; the journalists' own interests, educational background, and attitudes about what is important; competition with other media organizations; competition among stories about other issues and events; market or circulation size and location; legal constraints, amount of space or air time available; self-censorship; location and size of staff; and cultural and social values; and access to credible news sources.

Scholars have posited a number of variables or determinants of "newsworthiness" in the context of choosing which international events to report on. They include deviance and relevance; population; cultural affinity including language, ancestry, and religion; level of development and gross domestic product; trade relations; and proximity. G. Golan added the international news agendas of other media sources—in other words, inter-media competition—to that list.²⁸

Framing

Framing is one way that journalists exercise their news judgment, a process that includes deciding which elements of an event to include and what words or images to use. In a classic explanation, R. Entman wrote: "Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."²⁹

²⁵ See: "Turkmen Leader's Personality Cult under Wraps for Visiting Western Envoys," *Agence France Press*, 28 May, 2004.

²⁶ R. Mulholland, "The Cult of the Turkmen Leader," *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 2 November, 2001.

²⁷ See: M. Mencher, *News Reporting and Writing*, McGraw Hill, Boston, MA, 2005.

²⁸ See: G.J. Golan, "Intermedia Agenda Setting and Global News Coverage," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Toronto, ON, 2004.

²⁹ R.M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication*, No. 43 (4), 1993, p. 52.

As H. Chyi and M. McCombs observed, “A single news event can be framed in various ways, producing different versions containing different attributes.”³⁰ Especially important for this study is the fact that news frames and wording can manipulate how the public interprets issues and develops opinions, and how even subtle framing can lead readers to reach certain conclusions about the information they receive.³¹ As F. Gan *et al.* put it, “The fact that framing might lead audiences to have different reactions is an important implication for political communication.”³² As in this study, framing has been used to compare how media in different countries cover the same issues or events.³³

Without using the term “framing,” D. Kimmage described the stereotype of “dictator as clown,” a concept epitomized by actor Charlie Chaplin’s mocking of Adolph Hitler in the 1940 film *The Great Dictator*. However, such lampooning has moved beyond entertainment into what is offered as news, which mainstream journalists generally assert should be presented with objectivity. He wrote, “Today, the tradition of ‘dictator as clown’ persists in coverage of such countries as Turkmenistan, where it seems the only events deemed newsworthy by mainstream media are the supreme leader’s latest exploits.”³⁴

Declining Western Press Coverage of International News

For decades, researchers have tracked trends in the international content of U.S. newspapers, news magazines, and television broadcasts. Among them were Emery’s 1989 study finding that international news—an “endangered species”—had dropped from 10.2 percent of content in 1971 to 2.6 percent in 1988 in major dailies including the prestigious *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times*; his study period between November 1987 and January 1988 coincided with major news events in Israel’s Occupied Territories, Korea, the Persian Gulf, and Central America.³⁵ C. Stepp compared ten mainstream dailies in 1963-1964 and 1998-1999, finding that foreign news declined from 5 percent to 3 percent overall and from 20 percent to 5 percent on the front pages.³⁶ In broadcasting, G. Utley noted a precipitous decline in foreign coverage on ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news shows between 1989 and 1997.³⁷ There is variation among news outlets. For example, C. Beaudoin and E. Thorson found that the *Los Angeles Times* devoted 19 percent of its news hole to international coverage, a higher proportion than most U.S. dailies.³⁸

³⁰ See: H.I. Chyi, M. McCombs, “Media Salience and the Process of Framing: Coverage of the Columbine School Shootings,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, No. 81 (1), 2004, pp. 22-35.

³¹ See: G. Dell’Orto, D. Dong, J. Moore, A. Schneeweis, “The Impact of Framing on Perception of Foreign Countries,” *Ecquid Novi*, No. 25 (2), 2004, pp. 294-312.

³² F. Gan, J.L. Teo, B.H. Detenber, “Framing the Battle for the White House: A Comparison of Two National Newspapers’ Coverage of the 2000 United States Presidential Election,” *International Communication Gazette*, No. 67 (5), 2005, p. 443.

³³ See: C. Maslog, S.T. Lee, H.S. Kim, “Framing Analysis of a Conflict: How Newspapers in Five Asian Countries Covered the Iraq War,” *Asian Journal of Communication*, No. 16 (1), 2006, pp. 19-39.

³⁴ D. Kimmage, “Analysis: Dictator as Clown Grows Stale,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 31 May, 2004.

³⁵ See: M. Emery, “An Endangered Species: The International News Hole,” *Freedom Forum Media Studies Journal*, No. 3, 1989, pp. 151-164.

³⁶ See: C.S. Stepp, “Then and Now,” *American Journalism Review*, No. 21, 1999, p. 60.

³⁷ See: G. Utley, “The Shrinking of Foreign News: From Broadcast to Narrowcast,” *Foreign Affairs*, No. 76 (2), 1997, pp. 2-10.

³⁸ See: C.E. Beaudoin, E. Thorson, “LA Times Offered as Model for Foreign News Coverage,” *Newspaper Research Journal*, No. 22 (1), 2002, pp. 80-93.

The importance and potential impact of international news coverage has drawn research attention. Several early studies examined determinants of international news, including distance from the U.S. media capital of New York City, relevance to the United States, and potential for social change.³⁹ Examining *Newsweek's* coverage of Japan, A. Cooper-Chen observed how mass media portrayals can greatly influence U.S. citizens, many of whom lack direct knowledge about Japan.⁴⁰ In another study, D. Perry linked lack of information to "negative attitudes about foreign countries."⁴¹

The press may be the only source of information that the majority of Westerners have about foreign conflicts, but that is not to assert that the press is the sole agenda-setter, or even the most influential one, according to A. Schiffer's study of *New York Times* coverage of civil wars from 1992 to 1997. "The true, independent power of the news media to set the public agenda depends greatly upon the influences of news content."⁴² He found the magnitude of a conflict as measured in battle deaths and a president's public remarks downplaying or emphasizing a conflict are stronger indicators of coverage than the power that news organizations wield as independent political actors following "press-specific news-judgment criteria."

International coverage in the press in other developed countries has undergone scholarly examination as well.⁴³ There are many reasons for declining international coverage by Western media, ranging from financial pressures and mergers to management's perceptions and misperceptions about what readers, listeners, and viewers "want" to hear about. Utley wrote, "The new litmus test at network news programs is whether viewers (in the producers' opinion) will instinctively 'relate' to the story."⁴⁴ Beyond that—and directly relevant to coverage of Turkmenistan and the other Central Asian republics—have been major events outside the control of the media, starting with the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, the 11 September, 2001, attacks in the United States, the resulting "war on terrorism" and war in Afghanistan, and the outbreak of war in Iraq in 2003. Two years after the Soviet Union broke apart, the president of the Associated Press acknowledged that "viewed from the news desks of the Associated Press, the world's new sources of crisis are far more difficult to cover than the old ones."⁴⁵

More significant for this study of coverage of Turkmenistan, however, are media and public affairs commentators' lamentations over the same decades about shrinking coverage—to no apparent avail, as demonstrated by the continued minimizing of international coverage. Discussing the trend for U.S. television networks, for example, Utley wrote, "What is being lost, or at least weakened, has long been forecast: the role of a few television network news organizations as a unifying central nervous system of information for the nation, and the communal benefits associated with that."⁴⁶

³⁹ See: J. Gultrang, M.H. Ruge, "The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba, and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers," *Journal of Peace Research*, No. 2 (1), 1965, pp. 64-91; J.B. Adams, "Qualitative Analysis of Domestic and Foreign News on the APTA Wire," *Gazette*, No. 10, 1964, pp. 285-295; T. Chang, P.J. Shoemaker, N. Brendlinger, "Determinants of International News in the U.S. Media," *Communication Research*, No. 14 (4), 1987, pp. 396-414.

⁴⁰ See: A. Cooper-Chen, "Praising, Bashing, Passing: Newsmagazine Coverage of Japan, 1965-1994," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, LA, New Orleans, 1999.

⁴¹ D.K. Perry, "News Reading, Knowledge about and Attitudes Towards Foreign Countries," *Journalism Quarterly*, No. 67 (2), 1990, p. 357.

⁴² A.J. Schiffer, "Explaining Foreign Conflicts Coverage," Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, IL, Chicago, 2005.

⁴³ See: H. Holm, "The Forgotten Globalization of Journalism Education," *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, No. 56 (4), 2002, pp. 67-71; W.C. Soderland, M.F. Lee, P. Gecelovsky, "Trends in Canadian Newspaper Coverage of International News, 1988-2000: Editors' Assessments," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, No. 27, 2002, pp. 73-87; D. Halton, "International News in the North American Media," *International Journal*, No. 56, 2002, pp. 499-515.

⁴⁴ G. Utley, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁵ L.D. Boccardi, "Redeploying a Global Journalistic Army," *Media Studies Journal*, No. 7 (4), 1983, p. 44.

⁴⁶ G. Utley, op. cit., p. 10.

Also directly relevant to this study is the failure to reverse a pattern of international coverage by Western—and not solely U.S.—media that has long been criticized as biased, incomplete, largely negative, and concentrating mainly on developed countries.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, there has been little research into how Western news media have covered events in Central Asia since independence, despite the strategic importance of the region to the West. The few studies so far have generally examined the content of certain categories of stories, such as environment, political and press rights, and religion, and the news organizations' use of reporter pseudonyms and undisclosed sources.⁴⁸

Hypotheses and Research Question

- Hypothesis 1: Personal references about the late president of Turkmenistan appear in a majority of Western news stories about the country, even if the principal topic of the story is not the late president, his family, or his arguably grandiose or bizarre ideas, edicts, and projects.
- Hypothesis 2: A news organization will frequently use the same personalizing terminology about the late president of Turkmenistan in multiple stories.
- Research Question: How did Western news media frame the late president of Turkmenistan?

Method

This study examined news stories posted between 1 July, 2004 and 30 June, 2005 from three Western news organizations. This period encompassed four major political developments in the Commonwealth of Independent States: election of a new president in Ukraine in December 2004; the relatively peaceful ouster of Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev in March 2005; the violent suppression of protesters in Andijan, Uzbekistan in May 2005; and Russian President Vladimir Putin's continued consolidation of power and suppression of opponents throughout the period. BBC News online, Eurasianet, and Institute for War & Peace Reporting were selected for content analysis because each published at least six news articles about Turkmenistan during the study period. Although these organizations have different audiences and missions, all three provide a window on Turkmenistan—and, more broadly, Central Asia—to the outside world. The study also drew anecdotally from other Western media organizations that published fewer than six stories each during the same period. They included the *New York Times* and the *Independent*.

⁴⁷ For example, see: G.C. Wilhoit, D.H. Weaver, "Foreign News Coverage in Two U.S. Wire Services: An Update," *Journal of Communication*, No. 33 (2), 1983, pp. 132-148; D.H. Weaver, G.C. Wilhoit, "Foreign News Coverage in Two U.S. Wire Services," *Journal of Communication*, No. 31 (2), 1981, pp. 55-63; W.A.E. Skurnik, "A New Look at Foreign News Coverage," *African Studies Review*, No. 24 (1), 1981, pp. 99-112; J.A. Lent, "Foreign News in American Media," *Journal of Communication*, No. 27, 1977, pp. 46-51.

⁴⁸ For example, see: E. Freedman, M. Walton, "Independent News Web Sites' Coverage of Religious Freedom and Restraint in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 37 (1), 2006, pp. 102-111; E. Freedman, E. "Coverage of Environmental and Environmental Health News of Central Asia by Independent News Web Sites," in: *History and Society in Central and Inner Asia*, ed. by M. Gervers, U.E. Bulag, G. Long, University of Toronto Asian Institute, Toronto, ON, 2005, pp. 297-316; E. Freedman, "Coverage of Central Asian Political, Press, and Speech Rights Issues by Independent News Websites," *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, No. 16, 2005, pp. 71-86.

The BBC News Web site is the “Internet arm of the biggest broadcasting news-gatherer in the world” and relies on BBC’s own correspondents as well as other news agencies. Eurasianet is operated by the Open Society Institute’s Central Eurasia Project and provides news and analysis about Turkmenistan, the other four Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, Turkey, Mongolia, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Its coverage includes human rights as well as environment, economics and culture.⁴⁹ IWPR is an “international media development charity” registered in the United Kingdom and emphasizes “areas of conflict,” and reports on Central Asia including Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Belarus, Iraq, and the Caucasus with articles about environmental, human rights, and social issues, among other topics.⁵⁰

Each story about Turkmenistan was coded on the basis of whether it dealt primarily with an issue or primarily with Niyazov or one of his personally launched initiatives or projects. Coding also determined whether: Niyazov was mentioned by name, title, or position in the headline; the phrase “personality cult” or “cult of personality” appeared in the article, headline, or photo caption; and the title “Turkmenbashi” with or without its “Father of the Turkmen” translation appeared in the story, headline, or photo caption. Coding also determined whether a story: used words such as “eccentric,” “bizarre,” and “autocratic”; referred to such personal matters as his health, family, ruling style, habits, or portraits; or mentioned such projects and edicts as the ice palace, mosque construction, *Rukhnama*, or ban on long hair.

In addition, the proportion of paragraphs containing such references was calculated as an indicator of how much space in each news organization’s coverage was devoted to personal references.

Findings

Hypothesis 1 posited that a majority of stories would include personal frames, or personal references to Niyazov, whether the story was primarily about him or about an issue or event. Although the vast majority of stories principally concerned issues ranging from health care to the economy to energy (see Table 1), the hypothesis was strongly supported. Every Eurasianet story contained at least one personal reference, as did 83.3 percent of the BBC stories and 80 percent of the IWPR stories.

For example, BBC’s story about Niyazov’s decision to close all hospitals outside Ashgabad and to close rural libraries described the president as “well known for his idiosyncratic orders” and referred to his “spending millions of dollars in public money on grand projects, such as gold statues of the leader and a vast marble and gold mosque, one of the biggest in Asia” in his hometown.⁵¹ These certainly fit into what P. Valkenburg *et al.* described as human interest frames that bring “an individual’s story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem.”⁵²

While some such references would be expected in stories pertaining to Niyazov, his family, or his personally initiated edicts and projects, questions can be raised about their use in coverage of issues and public policy. Similarly, an IWPR article about AIDS included “Turkmenbashi,” “president for life,” and the fact that Niyazov had declared the 21st century as the “golden age of the Turkmen people.”⁵³

⁴⁹ See: “About Eurasianet,” *Eurasianet*, available at [eurasianet.org], 2007.

⁵⁰ See: “About IWPR: Aims and Activities,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, available at [www.iwpr.net/index.php?p=-apc_state=henh&s=o&o=top_aims.html], 2007.

⁵¹ M. Whitlock, “Turkmen Leader Closes Hospitals,” *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 1 March, 2005.

⁵² P.M. Valkenburg, H.A. Memetko, C.H. de Vreese, “The Effects of News Framers on Readers’ Thoughts and Recall,” *Journal of Communication*, No. 26 (5), 1999, p. 551.

⁵³ “Turkmenistan in AIDS Denial,” RCA 339, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 7 January, 2005.

The issue goes beyond mere inclusion of personal references about Niyazov into news stories and extends to how much space a news organization devotes to personal frames in its coverage. Table 1 shows the percentage of paragraphs containing a personal frame or reference in each organization's stories. That proportion ranged from about one-fifth of stories to twice that figure.

Table 1

**Personal Frame Paragraphs
in Stories by Three Western News Organizations,
1 July, 2004-30 June, 2005**

News organization	Eurasianet	BBC	IWPR
Stories	7	18	30
Number/percent issue stories	6/85.8%	10/55.6%	18/93.3%
Total paragraphs	98	268	679
Personal paragraphs	42	110	130
Percent of personal paragraphs	42.9%	41%	19.1%

The second hypothesis—that three news organizations frequently use the same belittling terminology about Niyazov—also was supported, although each news organization had its own preferred terminology. For example, one-third of BBC stories referred to a personality cult; 45 percent incorporated his “president-for-life” title; 39 percent used his self-proclaimed title “Turkmenbashi”; and 22 percent mentioned his book *Rukhnama*, which means “book of the soul.” Eurasianet referred to a personality cult in all but one story, used the adjective “mercurial” in 71 percent of its stories, and used “Turkmenbashi” in 57 percent. Finally, the self-proclaimed title “Turkmenbashi” appeared in 70 percent of IWPR stories.

The research question asked how Western news media frame Niyazov. The analysis shows two principal personal frames, one concerning personality and the other concerning ruling style. All three news organizations chose words and phrases that could be characterized as “belittling” in framing his personality and “demonizing” in framing his ruling style (see Table 2). For example, stories used such personality-related adjectives as “eccentric,” “idiosyncratic,” and “outlandish,” and such ruling style-related words as “autocratic,” “ruthless” and “close eye on his people.”

As Table 3 shows, half those stories containing personal references included both belittling and demonizing references. Where a story had only category of personal frame, it was fifteen times as likely to include demonizing rather than belittling references.

IWPR stories also referred to his foreign bank accounts and diamond rings, his multiple palaces, and an incident when he was reportedly seen “showering dollars” on musicians and dancers who performed for him. In addition, the news organizations repeatedly invoked personal iconic projects and edicts, even in articles not directly related to them. His book, *Rukhnama*, was mentioned in eleven of the fifty-five stories. Almost half the BBC stories mentioned his ubiquitous portraits in public places and his ban on smoking. And each news organization mentioned at least once his renaming of the calendar, an event that occurred before the study period.

Table 2

**Representative “Belittling” and
“Demonizing” Words about Niyazov
in Stories by Three Western News Organizations,
1 July, 2004-30 June, 2005**

<i>Belittling</i>
Idiosyncratic, mercurial, paranoia, eccentric, grandiose, fickle, outlandish, extravagant, glorify, arbitrary, styles himself, self-proclaimed, cult of personality, Golden Age of the People, standing ovation
<i>Demonizing</i>
Autocratic, president-for-life, Turkmenbashi, Father of the Turkmen, authoritarian, personal authority, political loyalty, close eye on his people, unchallenged authority, hold over society, dictatorship, tyrant, despotic, repressive, regime, totalitarian, fall (a)foul, Leader, ruthless, tough if sometimes unreliable, all powerful, one-party, iron fist, strongman, tight hold, exclusive hold on power, grip on power, disastrous legacy, impose his vision

Table 3

**News Stories Containing “Belittling” and
“Demonizing” Personal Frames
in Three Western News Organizations,
1 July, 2004-30 June, 2005**

Stories with personal frames	Stories with only belittling references	Stories with only demonizing references	Stories with both
Eurasianet	7	0	7
BBC	15	0	12
IWPR	24	1	11
Total	46	1	30

Discussion, Implications, and Future Research

It is essential to recognize that Niyazov was the figure most responsible for developing Turkmenistan’s national policies and programs and, thus, his persona could be a legitimate component of news coverage to put policies, programs, and events into context for readers. His regime’s construction of projects of questionable public benefit diverted vast resources away from social programs such

as health care, economic development, and pensions. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan's remote location, isolationist foreign policy, dearth of foreign correspondents, lack of independent domestic media, reluctance of potential news sources to be interviewed, penchant for official secrecy, and lack of governmental transparency combine to make it difficult for foreign journalists to report credibly and in depth on serious issues and controversies. Thus it was easier for journalists to focus on—or at least touch on—Niyazov himself.

With that understanding in mind, the findings reinforce Entman's observation that "the portrait of framing has important implications for political communication."⁵⁴ Here, the portrayal of Niyazov has implications for informed Western knowledge and understanding of political, economic, diplomatic, and human rights events and policies in Turkmenistan and, by extension, its Central Asian neighbors. The over-personalization of Western news coverage of Turkmenistan diverts serious attention from those events and policies. To draw a comparison, it would be as if the majority of foreign press stories about the United States during Bill Clinton's presidency incorporated a "president-as-slimeball" frame. Under that analogy, most stories in the non-U.S. press would have at least mentioned, if not dwelt on, Clinton's sexual infidelities, perjury, draft avoidance during the Vietnam War, marijuana use, "Slick Willy" nickname, and other personal matters irrelevant to substantive issues that were nominally the topic of those stories. In the case of Niyazov, the argument can be made that demonizing references are relevant from a newsworthiness perspective in some issue-related stories, including those about political activity and political and human rights. Certainly the phrase "exclusive hold on power" is relevant in BBC coverage of a parliamentary election in which every candidate belonged to the president's party and had pledged loyalty to Niyazov.⁵⁵ However, one can question the relevance of references to "cult of personality" and *Rukhnama* in an article about child laborers harvesting cotton.⁵⁶

When it comes to Western media coverage, Turkmenistan is "on the border of visibility," to use a phrase that D. Gladney applied to news about the Uighurs and Muslim unrest in China's Xinjiang region. He attributed skimpy American press attention to news from Xinjiang to "a combination of a lack of reporting on the ground and a lack of interest in the home offices of American news organizations," and said that stories by those reporters who do visit the region "get killed until a bomb goes off and alerts people that there is a problem."⁵⁷ That situation is similar to but not a perfect analogue of Western news coverage of Turkmenistan. While Niyazov's aberrational behavior may substitute for the bombings in Xinjiang as a device to get a story aired or printed, it remains difficult for Western journalists to obtain visas to report in the country.

Similarly, if even Japan, "as a non-Western country ... presents special challenges in reporting to a U.S. audience" as Cooper-Chen suggested,⁵⁸ how much greater is the challenge to reporters whose stories deal with a place as unfamiliar and remote to most Americans as Turkmenistan?

Even news organizations committed to international coverage usually ignored Turkmenistan or included only incidental or passing references in the context of broader stories, such as ones about energy or events in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. For example, the *International Herald Tribune* published passing references to Turkmenistan but no staff-written stories primarily about the country during the period of the study. When they did cover the country, they tended to include personal frames in their

⁵⁴ R.M. Entman, op. cit., p. 55.

⁵⁵ See: M. Whitlock, "Turkmenistan Poll Turnout 'Low,'" *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 20 December, 2004.

⁵⁶ See: "Turkmenistan Wrestles with Child Labor Issue as Cotton Harvest Approaches," *Eurasianet*, 1 September, 2004.

⁵⁷ D.C. Gladney, "On the Border of Visibility: Western Media and the Uyghur Minority," *Media Studies Journal*, No. 13 (1), 1999, p. 132.

⁵⁸ A. Cooper-Chen, op. cit.

stories. A rare Canadian Broadcasting Corporation story dealt with Niyazov's order banning national TV anchors from wearing too much makeup; the story also mentioned his decrees cracking down on long hair and beards, female students with unbraided hair and young people with gold-capped teeth.⁵⁹ A headline in the British newspaper the *Independent* spoke of "the bizarre world of Turkmenbashi the Great."⁶⁰ In a 2004 article about the second *Rukhnama* volume, the Russian news agency ITAR-TASS—which pays more attention to Turkmenistan than does the Western press—recapped how Niyazov had renamed the calendar months.⁶¹

Even the *New York Times*, which has long ranked among the world's elite daily newspapers⁶² and is often praised for its foreign affairs coverage, devoted little space to Turkmenistan during the period, publishing only three news articles—all briefs of eighty to 113 words each—about the country. Two dealt with Niyazov himself, with headlines that included such words as "autocrat plans elections" and "the president's mosque"; the third reported on the shipment of natural gas from Turkmenistan to Ukraine.⁶³ Also, a Week in Review analysis of the effects on the United States of changes in the Middle East included Turkmenistan only in a sidebar graphic showing a poster of Niyazov with the observation that his likeness "is displayed throughout the nation" and commenting that he "has created a Soviet-style personality cult."⁶⁴

A 2004 IWPR story about the weak Turkmen currency said Niyazov "can be seen showering (U.S.) dollars on the musicians and dancers who perform for him." That image is echoed in another *New York Times* Week in Review article, about reality television, incorporated Kimmage's 2004 "dictator as clown" concept in a discussion of Donald Trump's U.S. television reality series, "The Apprentice." The *Times* described a scene in which Trump was "hailed by a crowd of admirers outside Trump Towers as if he were the ruler of Turkmenistan, tossing coins at the supplicant peasants in front of his palace."⁶⁵

Framing poses risks for journalists and audiences alike, including the use of simplistic formulas to explain complex countries.

Kimmage's image of the "dictator as clown" also raises the question of whether leaders such as Niyazov notice the ridicule they engender in foreign media and react to it in a way that creates any positive change. "If Niyazov is not turning a blind eye and deaf ear to the world, it might be time for the media to retire the creaky knee-slappers about the 'world's weirdest dictator' and begin writing in greater depth about a place that is, to be honest, no longer terribly funny," he suggested.⁶⁶ But potential changes within Turkmenistan are not the principal concern to journalists elsewhere, or to their readers and audiences. Rather, the issue is how people outside Turkmenistan understand what is happening inside the country and what that news could mean to their own lives. What J. Mann wrote of China applies equally to Turkmenistan: "The urge to generalize is understandable, but China"—substitute Turkmenistan here—"is too big, too complex, too diverse to capture in a single frame."⁶⁷

⁵⁹ See: "Turkmenistan Leader Bans Makeup on TV," *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, 13 August, 2004.

⁶⁰ S. Castle, "The Bizarre World of Turkmenbashi the Great," *The Independent*, 23 April, 2005.

⁶¹ See: New *Rukhnama* by Turkmen Leader Saparmurat Niyazov Read to Turkmenistan's Parliament.

⁶² See: J.C. Merrill, H.A. Fisher, "The World's Great Dailies," Hastings, New York, 1980, pp. 25-42.

⁶³ See: S.L. Myers, "Turkmenistan: Autocrat Plans Elections," *New York Times*, April 2005, pp. A2, A9; idem, "Turkmenistan: Gas to Ukraine Halted," *New York Times*, 1 January, 2005, p. A9; "Turkmenistan: The President's Mosque," *New York Times*, 23 October, 2004, p. A6.

⁶⁴ R. Cohen, "What's in it for America?," *New York Times*, 6 March, 2005, pp. WK3.

⁶⁵ A. Stanley, "TV's Busby Berkeley Moment," *New York Times*, 30 January, 2005, p. WK1.

⁶⁶ D. Kimmage, op. cit.

⁶⁷ J. Mann, "Framing China: A Complex Country Cannot Be Explained with Simplistic Formulas," *Media Studies Journal*, No. 13 (1), 1999, p. 106.

In the future, researchers should look more broadly at foreign press framing of Central Asia, both to discuss the implications for understanding of the region and to compare contemporary media framing with previous studies of representations and stereotyping of “exotic” parts of the world. Such studies could examine the coverage of discrete events—such as the Tulip Revolution that ousted Kyrgyzstan’s president, Askar Akaev, in March 2005, or Uzbekistan’s violent suppression of protests in Andijan in May 2005—and issues of public controversy, such as Western and Russian military bases in the region or energy. It would also be fruitful to contrast coverage by Western and Russian media, especially in light of Russia’s renewed interest in political and economic ties with the republics.

THE SPECIAL FEATURES OF GEORGIA’S POLITICAL MEDIA MILIEU AFTER THE ROSE REVOLUTION

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The formation of independent media is one of the main achievements of the many years of reform of the Georgian political system. Georgia’s mass media is developing faster than other civil institutions. Despite the low level of election democracy, local self-government, and political parties, state-independent mass media organizations came into being after Georgia gained its independence. But—unfortunately there has to be a “but”—the mass media in Georgia have not only become the main lever in public opinion formation, but they are also a hefty weapon in the political struggle. Confirmation of this was the so-called Rose Revolution in November 2003, which not only raised the significance of the mass media, particularly television, but also revealed several shortcomings in their work.

State-independent television played a very important, if not decisive, role both in forming public moods and in raising the wave of revolutionary protest.¹ Until the parliamentary elections of 2003 (which escalated into the revolution), television companies could still deny their politicized nature and claim that they were trying to be objective; however, the revolution revealed and polarized their political views. The Rustavi-2 TV channel openly supported the revolution. Later, one of the popular anchorwomen on this television station admitted that the channel covered all the events of those days extremely tendentiously. So, Rustavi-2 turned out to be closely associated with the victorious political forces. It soon

¹ See: *Map of Georgia’s Mass Media*, Tbilisi, 2004, pp. 70-71.

became obvious that the special role of the mass media in Georgia's political system not only stemmed from the fact that the state and other political entities can use them to inform the population about their policy and their aims and values, but also from the fact that the mass media themselves have become a very powerful tool in the purposeful elaboration of political procedures in Georgia.

The mass media are still playing an extremely significant role in Georgia's present-day, post-revolutionary political system, but the quality and

nature of their influence on the political processes currently depend on how strongly they themselves feel pressure from the government, particular political groups, or other interested entities. According to various international assessments, Georgia is still viewed as a country with a partially free press,² which is primarily due to the government's increased pressure on the independent mass media.

² [www.freedomhouse.org], 2007.

Institutional State of the Mass Media (Relations with the Government—Legal and Economic Aspects)

Whereas before the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the government was guided by the principle "write and read," that is, there was freedom of criticism, and the government made no response to this criticism, now the government is very sensitive to any criticism on the part of the mass media. Due to the government's sensitivity to criticism, the number of mass media organizations, both television channels and newspapers, dramatically decreased in Georgia after the revolution. But on the other hand, the government categorically denies putting any pressure on the mass media, particularly when international organizations hint at this. For example, this year a scandal broke out over the OSCE report on Internet censorship in Georgia. The country's government, in the person of Giorgi Arveladze, the minister of economics and the president's closest aide, demanded an explanation from the OSCE. In response, the OSCE refuted the fact that the report contained critical comments about Georgia and called the incidence a misunderstanding.

The Georgian government indeed had something to justify itself with—censorship of the Internet is technically impossible, and what is the purpose of it. The Statistics Board and other corresponding official structures do not have data about the number of Internet users. However, according to several local experts, around 250,000 people in Georgia use the Internet at least once a month, and 30,000 users are regularly hooked up to broad band (DSL, ADSL) Internet.³ Due to this, the Georgian government is focusing its attention on traditional media organizations, which have a wider audience, and is bringing all of its pressure to bear on them.

In so doing, the government is trying to place particularly tight control on television channels, since they know the results of sociological polls, according to which 95% of the Georgian population obtains its information from television. But printed media employees also have a problem, and it primarily consists in the fact that despite the development trends, the circulation of printed mass media is still limited. Circulation of the main daily publications fluctuates between five and ten thousand

³ [www.newslab.ru/news/206350], 2007.

copies.⁴ Another obvious problem is the low professional level of most of Georgia's press workers. (The main reason for this is that experienced journalists are ignored, and their places have been taken over by amateurs.) The content of newspapers falls far below the standards of impartial, highly professional journalism.

According to local experts, Georgian journalists do not see a big difference between propaganda and information, are unable to distinguish facts from opinions, and see themselves more as enlighteners than informers. Television has assumed the role of the source of the latest information, whereas newspapers, judging from the nature of the publications, are unable to compete with television.⁵ The mélange of facts and commentary in the press has reached the point that it is essentially impossible to find an article (not counting the short reports of information agencies) that contains unbiased information. Appraisals are frequently given in titles and in annotations. The non-professionalism of journalists is not a new problem for the Georgian mass media, nor is the narrow and impoverished Georgian media market, which is unable to keep its head above water without subsidies. After the Rose Revolution, several negative trends arose with respect to the Georgian mass media. And this was despite the fact that in 2004, the Georgian parliament adopted a new law on freedom of speech and expression of opinion. Western experts evaluated this law as one of the most liberal in the entire post-Soviet expanse. Defamation was withdrawn from the sphere of criminal legislation. The law on freedom of speech and expression of opinion sets forth various regulations regarding the burden of proof for legal and physical entities, in so doing, shifting the burden of proof from the defendant to the claimant. It also sets forth the mechanism of absolute protection, without any exceptions, of sources of information used by journalists. From now on, it is not journalists, but the owners of the corresponding media organizations that must appear in court as defendants.⁶ All of these mechanisms create legislative foundations for the legal protection of the mass media, while in reality, the picture is very different. The government's use of strong levers of economic pressure on the mass media (for instance, with the help of the tax services) has already led to the closing of several media organizations, or to arise in price of their products, as happened with several newspapers when the country's parliament abolished the tax benefits existing for the printed mass media. These benefits were instituted in 2005 on the initiative of the country's president, Mikhail Saakashvili, in order to support the printed media. These benefits exempted the press from VAT, as well as from taxes on advertising services, property, and foreign economic activity. At one time, the government explained the privileged tax conditions for the press by the population's low financial solvency, which made it difficult to sell newspapers. This was precisely why benefits for the press were considered when drawing up the state budget draft for 2007. But as a result, although the press still faced the same problems, the benefits were abolished.

What is more, the government took another step backwards and cancelled its legislative innovation (meaning the adoption of the law on freedom of speech and expression of opinion). It introduced amendments and addenda into Georgia's fundamental law on general courts. In keeping with these amendments and addenda, all videoing, photography, and television broadcasting were banned both in the court room and throughout the entire building. The presence of so-called "writing journalists" is permitted in the court room, but only with corresponding permission from the judge.⁷ This means that the government is also beginning to put pressure on the activity of the mass media at the legislative level. The thing is that judges are an important source of scandalous information for the Georgian

⁴ See: *Vyzovy 21 veka dlia SMI na Iuzhnom Kavkaze*, Part 1, *Svoboda pechati v Gruzii*, Vienna, 2005, p. 44.

⁵ See: M. Muskhelishvili, *Svobodnye, no ne liberal'nye sredstva massovoi kommunikatsii i partikularisticheskiy sotsialnyy kontekst* (quoted from the manuscript).

⁶ Georgian Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression of Opinion, 2004.

⁷ Law on General Courts of Georgia, Art 12, Amendment of 2007.

mass media, it is precisely judicial power that is criticized most often in the mass media, particularly with respect to so-called politicized court procedures.

In addition, under government pressure, Georgian businessmen loyal to the government have bought up controlling sets of shares in private television companies and, in so doing, control has been tightened over independent television channels. For example, the Rustavi-2 channel has changed its owner twice since the revolution, the first time immediately after the revolution, in January 2004, when a close friend of the defense minister, Irakliy Okruashvili, became the owner, and the second time, after the retirement of this same minister in 2006. The owner of the Mze television station also changed after the revolution; the brother of Georgian foreign minister Gela Bezhuashvili became the owner. As a result, these television channels were joined into one media holding. The government tried, by means of these measures, to take centralized control over private television channels, on the one hand, and pin Imedi, the most highly rated television channel after the revolution, to the wall, on the other. In contrast to other national television channels, this station is conducting an information policy aimed against the government to a certain extent. This is the only television company in Georgia that currently airs political talk shows in which the government is often criticized and which are popular among the population. This is precisely why the government decided to boycott this channel's political talk shows and why government representatives, or those of the party in power, ignore Imedi's invitations. They hardly ever appear on the air of this channel. This is also why this channel is oriented toward giving air time to leaders of the opposition. In turn, in order to save his television station and prevent it from being sold by force to pro-government businessmen, or from being closed down, the owner of Imedi, Badri Patarkatsishvili, sold the channel's controlling set of shares to world-known media magnate Rupert Murdoch and his company, News Corporation. The entry into Georgia of such a world brand is an unprecedented event throughout the entire post-Soviet space and experts hope that it will promote the development of both the media infrastructure and of freedom of speech in Georgia. But local observers also nurtured such hopes regarding the transformation of state television into public broadcasting.⁸

In 2004, the country's parliament adopted a law on public broadcasting (it came into force on 1 January, 2006), but today it can be said in no uncertain terms that public broadcasting financed from the pockets of taxpayers has not justified the hopes of the population. Seventeen million lari are allotted from the country's budget every year, but this is having no positive impact either on the quality of the television programs, or on freedom of speech on the air.

Theatricalization of the Political Process with the Help of the Mass Media— Less Politics, More Entertainment

In Georgia, there are obviously taboo issues that journalists will not touch with a barge pole. Another important problem consists in the despondent monotony of most of the news programs. News programs either present reports on whom the president met with, or stories about what newly built facility or children's home he visited. This is bringing to light the problems of editorial independence in the Georgia mass media. What is more, government-controlled mass media are trying their best to

⁸ The Rustavi-2 Television Company. "Open Topic" Program, 23 March, 2006.

attract the attention of as large an audience as possible. Diverse means constantly used by television for attracting and entertaining people serve this same purpose. And this is causing theatricalization of the political process. For example, the pro-government mass media often show live broadcasts of the arrest of corrupted officials. The authorities believe this will help to raise the powers that be rating among the population. But this is not always successful. For example, recently the Georgian law-enforcement bodies arrested 24 local municipal and self-government officials right in the middle of a business meeting in Kutaisi, the second largest city after Tbilisi. But it turned out that some of the arrested people had already been detained by the law-enforcement bodies several days previously and now they were being taken especially to the office where the business meeting was held in order to collectively arrest them again in front of the television cameras, whereby with the help of special service agents in masks.⁹

This is a graphic example of how turning political processes into a show can lead (if it is not yet leading) to an atmosphere of mistrust among the population of the government and political processes as a whole. As a result of all of this, the local oppositionists have been calling post-revolutionary Georgia a “Television State.” Under conditions when the government runs the country with the help of the mass media it controls, the number of live transmissions of statements by government members, the president, and leaders of the party in power has dramatically grown. In so doing, journalists very rarely succeed in asking the speechmaker questions, since television cameramen, not journalists, are usually invited to such briefings. And even if journalists are invited, they are only allowed to ask those questions permitted. What is more, employees of printed mass media are invited increasingly infrequently to the briefings of the highest state officials. This is explained by their greater tendency to criticize compared with television channels.

Television companies are not only engaged in entertaining the audience, but are entertaining themselves as well. The authorities are even prompting them to do this. For example, a beauty contest among female journalists called “mass vogue” is held once a year with the support of the Tbilisi mayor’s office. During this function, half-naked female journalists line up before the jury members (who are mainly representatives of the country’s political leadership). Not only representatives of the pro-government television companies, but also of the opposition television company, Imedi, participate in this show. This lack of principled conduct on the part of employees of the electronic media sometimes goes against their information policy. And as a result, society loses—instead of socially significant information, it receives secondary, insignificant information. For example, this summer, the information programs of all the television channels broadcast (for several days in a row) a story about the preparations for “mass vogue” by way of the “main news,” while the question of journalists’ limited access to the court rooms was becoming more urgent.

It should be added to the above that after the television company owners changed, there was essentially a change in the entire journalist corps at Rustavi-2, Mze, and even at the public television company. Most of the journalists who participated in the Rose Revolution either moved to the press secretariats of prestigious ministries, or obtained higher posts in various state structures, and those who stayed on to work in the mass media are currently creating different kinds of educational and entertainment shows instead of political programs.

For example, in the latest television season, Rustavi-2 is showing four comedy and four so-called reality shows. One of these shows is such an expensive project for the Georgian television market that it is obviously being financed by outside subsidies and has a political undertone. I am talking about the Last Hero project popular throughout the world. Rustavi-2 and the political forces behind it are trying by means of such projects to attract viewers away from Imedi’s television audience (this station is placing the emphasis more on the political theme). But the fact remains a fact. According to all the

⁹ The Imedi Television Company, “Open Topic” Program, 5 July, 2007.

sociological surveys, Imedi, the television company of Badri Patarkatsishvili and Rupert Murdoch, is the leader in Georgia. The thing is that this is the only national company that tries to perform the main function of the mass media and (along with entertainment and educational functions) inform society about political events. It was the first to notify society about the murder of a young banker. The highest interior officials were involved in this tragedy. Coverage of this event helped to raise Imedi's rating. Before the revolution, Rustavi-2 was the leader, but its rating has dropped so much that the television company has launched a publicity campaign in the regions called "I love Rustavi-2." On the other hand, this television station is greatly favored by the government structures (even more than the former state television channel). All the exclusive stories from the Ministry of the Interior on the arrests of corrupted officials go first to Rustavi-2, and the country's leaders specifically do comments for it, while entirely ignoring Imedi, the most highly rated talk shows of which are the weekly "Reakt-siia" (Reaction) and the daily "Efir Dnia" (Current Affairs).

The television milieu in Georgia is as follows:

- National channels (opposition)—Imedi.
- National channels (pro-government)—Rustavi-2, Mze, Public Television, Ajarian Television, Alania.
- National channels (entertainment)—1 Stereo, Musical Box.

There are also regional channels, for example, Kavkasia, which broadcasts only in Tbilisi and its suburbs and is distinguished by criticism of the government. As for other regional mass media, they are unable to have an influence on the political processes throughout the country as a whole.¹⁰ In addition to those listed, there are several dozen other television and radio channels in the regions.

C o n c l u s i o n

So the change in Georgia's political media milieu is obvious, just as is the government's desire to control the media. Although the main problem is that the journalists themselves are not against restricted freedom of speech. Journalists (television) are inclined to play into the government's hands, fearing that otherwise they may lose their high-paid jobs on television.

Georgia needs to review and reconsider its journalism, the professional values of journalism, and the role of mass media owners and their influence on society. Another reason for the mass media's lack of responsibility to society is possibly related to the fact that so far it has not been possible to theoretically reinforce the mechanism of self-regulation in journalism. In 2006, the government tried to adopt a code of ethics for the electronic media, but this attempt was not crowned by success. Both local television employees and international organizations were against the suggested code.¹¹ If this code is adopted, Georgian television journalists, when covering a multi-thousand campaign, for example, would have to ask for permission to film from literally every participant in this event.¹²

The code did not go through, but the Georgian media workers did not offer anything in exchange.

Despite the lack of responsibility among media employees, they enjoy great trust among the population. According to the data of the latest sociological polls conducted by the International Republican Institute, the mass media belong to the top five best social and political institutions.

In terms of trust among the population, the places are distributed as follows:

¹⁰ See: *Map of Georgia's Mass Media*, p. 71.

¹¹ The Imedi Television Company, Khronika Information Program, 5 December 2006.

¹² See: *Code of Broadcasters Ethics Draft*, Art 14, Second Paragraph, 2006.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1. The Russian Orthodox Church | —89% |
| 2. The army | —86% |
| 3. The mass media | —82% |
| 4. The police | —66% |
| 5. The national bank | —63%. |

It should be kept in mind that approximately the same sociological poll was conducted in Georgia by the Gallup Institute in 2004, and the following reply was obtained to the question “Which sociopolitical institution do you trust most?”:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. The mass media | —84% |
| 2. The church | —89% |
| 3. The president’s office | —73% |
| 4. The government | —57% |
| 5. The parliament | —54% |
| 6. The army | —45% |
| 7. The national bank | —32% |
| 8. Political parties | —32% |
| 9. The education system | —27% |
| 10. Trade unions | —11%. ¹³ |

A similar study was conducted in 2005 as well by the Georgian office of the American Bar Association, according to which the mass media were ahead of the president’s office, the parliament, the judicial system, the police, and other institutions.¹⁴ In spite of everything, the Georgian mass media still have a credit of trust among the population and are obliged to justify it. They should fight for their freedom. This is the gist of a serious problem associated with independence and journalistic solidarity. However, the government holds the main responsibility for the current situation, as, according to the Constitution, it is the main guarantor of freedom of speech and printed matter.

¹³ IRI, USAID, Baltic Surveys / The Gallup Organization, IPM, Georgian National_Voters Study. February 2004.

¹⁴ [www.abanet.org/ceel/].