

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING VOL. 13 NO. 20 2 NOVEMBER 2011

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ANALYTICAL ARTICLES:

**NAGORNO-KARABAKH, THE WAR
THAT NEVER ENDS**
Stephen Blank

**KYRGYZSTAN'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS:
AS GOOD AS IT GETS IN CENTRAL ASIA**
Erica Marat

**VIKING RAILROAD CONNECTS
SCANDINAVIA WITH SOUTH CAUCASUS,
CENTRAL ASIA, AND CHINA**
Nicklas Norling

**FAILED NEGOTIATIONS SUGGEST
RENEWED POLITICAL CONFRONTATION
IN ARMENIA**
Mikayel Zolyan

FIELD REPORTS:

**AFTER RELEASE, TAJIK JOURNALISTS
SEEK EXONERATION**
Alexander Sodiqov

AZERBAIJAN IN THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL
Mina Muradova

**NAZARBAYEV SUPPORTS PUTIN'S EURASIAN
UNION BUT REMAINS CAUTIOUS**
Georgiy Voloshin

**KOCHARYAN UNLIKELY TO PARTICIPATE IN
ARMENIAN ELECTIONS BEFORE 2018**
Haroutiun Khachatryan

NEWS DIGEST



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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Contents

Analytical Articles

- NAGORNO-KARABAKH, THE WAR THAT NEVER ENDS** 3
Stephen Blank
- KYRGYZSTAN'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: AS GOOD AS IT GETS IN CENTRAL ASIA** 6
Erica Marat
- VIKING RAILROAD CONNECTS SCANDINAVIA WITH SOUTH CAUCASUS, CENTRAL ASIA, AND CHINA** 9
Nicklas Norling
- FAILED NEGOTIATIONS SUGGEST RENEWED POLITICAL CONFRONTATION IN ARMENIA** 12
Mikayel Zolyan

Field Reports

- AFTER RELEASE, TAJIK JOURNALISTS SEEK EXONERATION** 15
Alexander Sodiqov
- AZERBAIJAN IN THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL** 16
Mina Muradova
- NAZARBAYEV SUPPORTS PUTIN'S EURASIAN UNION BUT REMAINS CAUTIOUS** 18
Georgiy Voloshin
- KOCHARYAN UNLIKELY TO PARTICIPATE IN ARMENIAN ELECTIONS BEFORE 2018** 19
Haroutiun Khachatrian

- News Digest** 21

THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English-language journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing Central Asia and the Caucasus. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports, however authors are encouraged to suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst*, described below.

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Submission Guidelines:

Analytical Articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,100 and 1,500 words. The articles are structured as follows:

KEY ISSUE: A short 75-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-450 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

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

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THE PERILS OF NON-RESOLUTION IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Stephen Blank

The unresolved conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has once again raised its head. This is not surprising because the failure of Moscow's attempt to broker a solution earlier this year appears to have conformed to a dynamic common to such conflict. Failed efforts at mediation lead to renewed tensions as each side blames the other and the spiral of recriminations continues until wiser heads or some other crisis prevails. New developments are contributing to an upsurge of tensions. Bako Sahakyan, president of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic told an interviewer that he wants an active role in any future negotiation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Naturally that would be a cause for breaking up any negotiation from Azerbaijan's standpoint.

BACKGROUND: Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, speaking in July to students, suggested that future generations would and should undertake the task of reclaiming what was once Western Armenia, historically part of the medieval Armenian kingdom, but now part of Turkey ever since the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish response was predictable. Prime Minister Recep Tayip Erdogan immediately demanded an apology, but no such response is immediately forthcoming. Worse, Sargsyan admitted that Armeno-Turkish relations are deadlocked and no progress is to be expected. Given these kinds of policy postures it should be clear that Armenian politics are hostage to the idea that Yerevan can retain Nagorno-Karabakh indefinitely while Moscow will protect it from all evil. Therefore it does not have to deal either with its neighbors or its own urgent socio-economic problems. As Gerard Libaridian recently pointed out in a powerful essay, this outlook is a delusionary policy that can only further undermine Armenia's security and ultimately its statehood.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan is building a wall along portions of the line of contact with the armed forces of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic,

ostensibly to defend Azerbaijani villages from Armenian fire.

Once the negotiations brokered by Moscow broke down, these kinds of phenomena were to be expected. Armenian political scientist Arman Melikyan claims that in those tripartite negotiations Moscow was to broker the surrender of occupied territories, thereby ensuring its military presence and establishing a network of military bases in Azerbaijan to prevent any further cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO. While Armenian authorities reportedly accepted this plan, Baku refused to do so and saved Armenia, which clearly wants to incorporate Nagorno-Karabakh. Inasmuch as recent Wikileaks revelations make clear that Azerbaijan desires the full cooperation of NATO on its behalf and at least says it would even consider membership if not for Russian and Iranian opposition, its rejection of this transparent neo-imperialist Russian ploy is hardly surprising.

IMPLICATIONS: These revelations show the danger in leaving the initiative in negotiations in Russia's hands alone. Reportedly, French President Nicolas Sarkozy proposed a new round of mediation with the approval of both



the U.S. and Russia during his recent Caucasian tour. But in the meantime Azerbaijani officials like Elchin Huseynli of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have accused the OSCE of passivity and support for Armenia rather than Azerbaijan's just position. While this complaint is hardly surprising, Huseynli rightly pointed to the Armeno-Russian military collaboration that underscores the conflict and reflects Moscow's unrelenting desire to recover some of its lost imperial heritage in the Caucasus. There are clearly good reasons for this accusation given Melikyan's revelations. Russian analysts like Mikhail Aleksandrov at the Institute of the CIS claim that Azerbaijan is stimulating an arms race by lavishing expenditures on its military. While that is true, it is clear that bilateral military cooperation between Moscow and

Yerevan dates back almost twenty years to 1992 and took the form of massive arms transfers, so the question of who is to blame is unclear. Aleksandrov also charged that Azerbaijan would be better off not buying weapons and that Moscow's ties with Yerevan support the regional balance of powers and creates a counterweight to Turkey. Otherwise, the West would penetrate the region even militarily and we would then see something like Libya and Syria in the south Caucasus. Such self-serving justifications of Russian meddling and neo-imperialism are also to be expected. Thus, Aleksandrov's demand that Azerbaijan alone make concessions, which was apparently the form of the abortive Russian effort at brokering a settlement, is clearly a non-starter.

The recent failures are unsurprising. Azerbaijan's relations with the U.S. are now improving and joint exercises between the two states' armed forces recently took place, albeit in Germany and Romania. But Baku clearly also wants weapons and NATO support. In addition, it has reinvigorated ties to Turkey since the Armenian gate is now completely closed to the Erdogan regime. Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz said in Baku that Turkey is ready to support and join the Azerbaijani army in defense production. Both states have also signed an agreement on strategic cooperation and formed a high advisory council. Thus Azerbaijan has apparently decided to reject Moscow's demand that it subordinate its defense and security policy to Moscow. Earlier U.S. ambassadors suspected that Azerbaijan raised the issues of Russian military support for Armenia to break through the CFE treaty limits and were wary of supporting those requests. However, if

Melikyan's remarks are true, and these have not been denied, there is ample reason for Azerbaijan's insecurity. Yet, this situation also reflects the fact that despite immense military spending, now reaching US\$ 3 billion per annum, Azerbaijan has not yet succeeded achieving military superiority in the theater.

Baku's vocal complaints about Armenia's purchase of rockets and other weapons worth millions of dollars from Moldova should be seen in this light. It appears that these weapons originated in Benghazi before transiting to Armenia through Moldova's capital Chisinau. Although much of this story is not yet certain it is clear that gun running on a big scale is occurring and in view of Moldova's notoriety as a hotbed of corruption, its involvement in this affair is unsurprising. These trends do suggest, however, that the stagnation of efforts to bring about true mediation rather than Russian neo-imperial fantasies may be contributing to the development of a vicious spiral including reciprocal arms buildups on both sides.

Under the circumstances and in view of the fact that Russia is hardly a disinterested or impartial mediator it is high time that the other co-chairs of the Minsk Group, France and the U.S., either singly or collectively step in to try and mediate this conflict in such a way that both Armenia and Azerbaijan can retain their independence, integrity and sovereignty along mutually acceptable lines. It seems clear from the record of the last twenty years that Moscow sees this conflict as an opportunity to aggrandize its power and influence at the expense of both states, and by continually trying to do so

contributes to the inflammation of regional tensions and ensuring the failure of its own mediatory efforts. In the Caucasus Russia appears as if it wants to dance at all the weddings simultaneously and be both a prosecutor and defense attorney as well as a seemingly impartial mediator all at once, clearly an impossible task and one that compromises Azerbaijan.

CONCLUSIONS: A new war over Nagorno-Karabakh would be a disaster for everyone concerned and the only beneficiary would probably be Russia who could then try to implement its neo-imperial vision over the corpses of the ensuing fatalities. But that hardly meets the interests or objectives of Azerbaijan or Armenia, let alone Turkey and the West. The regression on both sides since the abortive Russian initiative points to the only possible way of mediating this conflict that should have been recognized and implemented long ago; namely a Western initiative including Russia as a supporting actor and not as the leader of the Caucasus. From the foregoing record, the failure of the earlier round of negotiations was an expected outcome. But as current history and the present trends in the Caucasus suggest, unless a genuine mediation moves forward, negotiations would likely become a surprising rather than a likely outcome.

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KYRGYZSTAN'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: AS GOOD AS IT GETS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Erica Marat

The presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan on October 30 marked the first peaceful and voluntary handover of power from one leader to another in the history of post-Soviet Central Asia. Despite some shortcomings reported by external observers, the elections took place in an environment of freedom and impartiality. Kyrgyzstan's task now is to sustain its development towards consolidated democratic practices. The president-elect, Almazbek Atambayev, has promised that from now on Kyrgyzstan will not see another revolution. However, he faces serious challenges.

BACKGROUND: Following a turbulent 2010 marked by ethnic violence, regime change, a constitutional referendum, and parliamentary elections, Kyrgyzstan spent 2011 learning how to function as a parliamentary state. The interim government that came to power after ousting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's regime sought to avoid excessive state control over public life and to make the political process more transparent. By changing the constitution, interim president Roza Otunbayeva pledged that it will become difficult for future leaders to concentrate too much power in their own hands. She also promised to leave her post in less than two years, opening the possibility for Kyrgyzstan to have the first peaceful transfer of power in Central Asia.

The reforms initiated by the interim government in 2011 culminated with the presidential election held on October 30. With a turnout of 61 percent and 16 candidates running, Prime Minister Atambayev won the presidency with 63 percent of the vote. His strongest opponents, leader of Butun Kyrgyzstan Adakhan Madumarov and leader of Ata-Jurt Kamchybek Tashiyev gained 14.7 percent and 14.3 percent respectively. According to the new constitution the president is elected for six

years and for a maximum of two consecutive terms.

Although the exact outcome of the presidential election was largely unpredictable, several months before the vote Atambayev emerged as the clear front-runner. Initially, 86 candidates registered to run for the presidency, but 70 dropped out before the official campaign period began. Most of them were either unable to collect the necessary amount of signatures, submit the 100,000 soms registration fee to the CEC or pass the Kyrgyz language proficiency exam. A few candidates, including Omurbek Tekebayev, leader of Ata-Meken party, and Nariman Tuleev decided not to run. As a result, 16 candidates appeared on the final ballot.

Although at times clumsy, the electoral campaign was conducted in a freer environment than any of Kyrgyzstan's previous presidential elections. For the first time, all competing candidates had the opportunity to participate in televised debates while citizens, especially those using the Internet, could send their questions directly to the candidates during the debates. During televised debates candidates talked about pressing economic and political issues, their involvement in corruption and ties to organized crime. Most candidates insisted on



strengthening the rule of law in the country and uniting the society regardless of north-south divisions and ethnic origin. The candidates also focused on distancing themselves from corruption and professing their ardent hopes to keep the country united. In the end the voters were to decide which of the candidates did the best job at representing their interests.

During the election campaign period Atambayev's opponents and various NGO leaders accused him of using his position as Prime Minister to gain an unfair advantage over other candidates. In response to growing criticism, Atambayev agreed to delegate his prime ministerial responsibilities to his deputy, Omurbek Babanov. Dinara Oshurahunova, leader of the NGO Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, has said that civil society observers did not uncover any cases of using administrative resources in favor of specific candidates.

IMPLICATIONS: The presidential elections marked the first time in post-Soviet Central

Asia's history that there is a peaceful and voluntary handover of power from one leader to another. Similar to the parliamentary elections in 2010, the 2011 presidential election was fairly transparent and monitored by international observers. Over 300 OSCE observers and 1,000 observers from the NGO Coalition monitored the elections. The OSCE praised the peaceful and orderly manner in which the elections were conducted, but pointed to a number of shortcomings that must be overcome for Kyrgyzstan to consolidate its democratic practices. The candidate registration was inclusive, while the campaign was open and respecting fundamental freedoms.

This was, however, overshadowed by flaws in the voter lists and tabulation process, according to the OSCE. Hundreds of voters were not able to cast their votes because of incomplete lists. Furthermore, a few attempts by Madumarov's supporters to buy votes were reported. Finally, the Central Election Commission's work was "adequate, but sometimes lacked transparency,"

the OSCE concluded. Some in Kyrgyzstan doubt that Atambayev could really earn such significant support in the first round without falsifying at least a portion of the election results. Although many of his supporters voted for Atambayev to avoid a second round that would highlight the north-south divide, few expected that he would win by such a wide margin. According to most international observers, however, these shortcomings were not significant enough to affect the outcome of the election.

These elections were challenging because old players had to compete for the presidency in a free and transparent environment. Predictably, candidates who had been ousted from power as a result of the April 2010 regime change tended to criticize the current system of governance. Madumarov and Tashiyev accused Atambayev of using “administrative support” and thus refused to recognize the outcome of the election. Both have already mobilized crowds in Osh and Jalal-Abad to protest the election result and request a new round of voting. Atambayev is currently leading negotiations with both politicians to ensure that the situation does not spiral out of control. Unless all three leaders agree on a deal, the situation will remain tense in the southern parts of the country.

Most voters voted according to their regional identity – Atambayev scored high in the northern part of the country, while the southern regions were Madumarov’s and Tashiyev’s strongholds. In Bishkek, Tashiyev has a reputation of being a nationalist who wants a return to a presidential system, while Atambayev was usually viewed as the

presumptive winner. Tashiyev has been trying to deflect his image as a nationalist, but he still warns voters that the north-south divide could destabilize the country. In contrast, Atambayev positions himself as a leader who recognizes the need to bridge this divide and unite the country. “Kyrgyzstan is for all,” was Atambayev’s main campaign slogan, arguing that despite social diversity the country must stand united. His pre-election decision to raise salaries for teachers and his promises to boost economic growth over the next few years were largely viewed as campaign strategies.

CONCLUSIONS: The last year and a half have been critical for Kyrgyzstan’s political development. Against all odds the country has set a precedent for a peaceful transfer of power. Kyrgyzstan has not become a more democratic country merely by holding acceptable elections, but like during the parliamentary elections last year, the country avoided violent confrontation between various competing political groups. This alone should be considered a positive example in Central Asia’s reality where state institutions are hollow and leaders are corrupt. Kyrgyzstan’s stability will depend on how the competing factions led by Madumarov and Tashiyev will choose to work with the new head of state. In the meantime, Atambayev will need to live up to his promises and eschew the temptation to concentrate political power in his hands, thus avoiding repeating the mistakes of his predecessors.

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VIKING RAILROAD CONNECTS SCANDINAVIA WITH SOUTH CAUCASUS, CENTRAL ASIA, AND CHINA

Nicklas Norling

The Viking Railroad, connecting Lithuania with Ukraine via Belarus, is not among the most well-publicized transportation projects in the former Soviet Union but it is emerging as one of the most important. Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan have recently announced their willingness to partake and volumes are steadily expanding. The potential gains are also significant. Not only will participating governments capture sizeable transit revenues but old animosities, notably between Belarus and Lithuania, are being addressed as part of it. Russia, too, benefits as competition will revitalize its own railroads. The Viking Railroad's commercial viability is proven but endemic corruption in states beyond may derail further extensions and erase the slim margins to sea-borne trade.

BACKGROUND: On October 11, Trend News Agency reported Kazakhstan's desire to participate in the Viking Railroad project, connecting the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda with the Black Sea, with planned extensions to the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and China. Astana's interest in the project follows similar recent declarations from Baku and Tbilisi. The Viking Railroad was launched in 2003 but did not gather real momentum until around 2007, coinciding with the launch of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative.

The Viking Railroad is an intermodal project, using both rail and ship. The project's core runs between Klaipeda in Lithuania, via Belarus, to the Ukrainian port of Odessa on the Black Sea, but its full stretch includes the United Kingdom and distant China. Starting in Great Britain, cargo is transported by DFDS Seaways to Gothenburg in Sweden where it links with a cross-country railroad hauling containers to the port of Karlshamn on the Baltic Sea.

After arriving at the port of Klaipeda on the Baltic Sea's Eastern Shore, containers are forwarded via Viking Railroad to Odessa,

across the Black Sea, and thence to either Turkey or Georgia. The Turkey spurs extend southward towards the Middle East, the Georgian port of Batumi links the project to onward connections in Armenia and Azerbaijan. From Baku freight is shipped across the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan, transiting Uzbekistan, to the southern Kazakh city of Almaty close to the Chinese border. Once in China, cargo is loaded onto the East-West railroad connecting Western China with the booming coastal cities of Shanghai and Beijing.

The Viking train, running two times a day, carries both 20 and 40 feet containers and is, according to the railroad consortium, cheaper and faster than truck transport. Realizing these time savings and economic gains, forwarders are increasingly turning to rail as seen in expanding volumes on this line. For example, in 2003 only 175 TEU (one TEU is equivalent to a 20-foot container) was transported. By 2007 this figure had expanded to 40,066 TEU, representing roughly two fifty car locomotives per day, and transported cargo over the first eight months of this year already exceed the total for 2010.

While the primary motivating factor for the Viking Railroad is commercial, the project is financed with EU support and accords with Brussels' Eastern Partnership initiative for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, launched in 2008-2009. It also forms part of Lithuania's own "neighborhood policy" involving active promotion of ties with the South Caucasus, as manifested in the opening of Lithuanian Embassies in Yerevan and Baku in 2007, and Vilnius' active promotion of EU-Belarus and EU-Ukraine ties.

The Viking Railroad is merely one component in a much larger, uncoordinated, effort of post-colonial reintegration and diversification of transport links across the continent. For more than a century Russia's imperial strategy was to strengthen links with the center while leaving those among the other non-Russian republics underdeveloped. This map is now being reconfigured, introducing a healthy amount of competition in territories heretofore under Moscow's purview.

IMPLICATIONS: Five main implications can be identified. First, the Viking Railroad will dovetail with a number of other similar projects elsewhere, producing both economic synergies and a plethora of new connections. Notable examples include China's railroad investments in Central Asian and South Asian networks; railroad projects linking Afghanistan to Iran, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and China; North-South railroad projects connecting Kazakhstan with the Persian Gulf; and the recent completion of a line running from Pakistan to Turkey. Uzbekistan's desert town of Navoi is emerging as the hub of these developments, catering to both North-South and East-West networks and, including, it seems, Viking Railroad.

Second, the Viking Railroad will promote better ties among participating countries. Interlocutors underline that Former Lithuanian Minister of Economy, Petras Česna, repeatedly voiced his concern in the early 2000s that Belarus used its exports from the Klaipeda port as a bargaining chip in return for energy sales. With Belarus now being a participant in the Viking Railroad, it will cement ties between these countries and diversify their trade and transport links away from Soviet-era dependencies.

Third, the Viking Railroad introduces further competition into Eurasian railroad transportation. This is essential if railroads are to remain competitive with sea-borne transport. Specifically, Viking Railroad and its stretches across the Black Sea will compete with the so-called Eurasian Landbridge, running from Rotterdam to the Chinese East Coast north of the Black and Caspian Seas via Russia and Kazakhstan. The competition between these two corridors will promote speedier border crossings and ultimately produce a business climate more conducive to trade and development.

Fourth, as with any transportation or pipeline project in post-Soviet space, there will be geopolitical implications attached to it. Russia has so far stayed silent on the Viking Railroad initiative but if any precedent can be inferred from its reaction to the European Eastern Partnership, which Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quick to denounce, Moscow is likely to oppose these developments. Is Russia the inevitable "loser"? Not necessarily. Russian companies can utilize Viking Railroad in its own trade with Great Britain, the Middle East, and South Asia, strengthening ties with the former Soviet republics and countries beyond on a sound commercial basis. Competition will

also spur its own languishing Mercury Line, running from Klaipeda, via Belarus, to Russia.

Fifth, all of these gains may come to naught if the problems of corruption and slow border-crossings are not addressed. Only a cursory glance at the completed projects of EU's TRACECA initiative suggests that corruption deserves more attention than hitherto acknowledged. One extensive study on the Moldova-Ukraine border crossing, for instance, only notes this problem in passing. Cut-throat competition with sea-borne transport, slim margins of operation, and demands for just-in-time deliveries, make the viability of overland transport contingent on tackling these two impediments successfully.

CONCLUSIONS: The Viking Railroad forms part of a much more wide-ranging effort of post-colonial reintegration with neighbors and states beyond. It will produce economic synergies, options, and opportunities as it

dovetails with other similar projects across the continent. The railroad will upgrade political relations among participating states, warming frosty ties among some of them. Russia will gain, too, as competition forces Moscow to improve its own services. The greatest obstacles to these potential gains are corruption and slow customs procedures, which alone or in conjunction may short-circuit extensions beyond Georgia. The core of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative is promotion of rule of law, the core of TRACECA is transport. Coordinating these two programs is key to exploit the full potentials of Viking Railroad and its extension further east.

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FAILED NEGOTIATIONS SUGGEST RENEWED POLITICAL CONFRONTATION IN ARMENIA

Mikayel Zolyan

Negotiations between Armenia's government and the main opposition force, the Armenian National Congress, have come to a halt. After a week of day-and-night rallies, demanding the immediate resignation of the incumbent president and snap elections, the opposition eventually announced that it was getting ready for the regular parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2012. These developments were taking place against the background of an apparent rift within the government camp, caused by rumors about the possible return of Armenia's second president Robert Kocharyan into active politics.

BACKGROUND: Armenia's current political landscape is shaped by the confrontation between the government coalition, led by the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), headed by the incumbent president Serzh Sargsyan, and the most influential opposition force, the Armenian National Congress (ANC), headed by Armenia's first president, Levon-Ter-Petrosyan. The opposition refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the incumbent government claiming that the presidential elections of 2008 were falsified. It also blames the government for the violent crackdown on post-elections protests that took place on March 1, 2008, resulting in 10 deaths and the detention of numerous opposition activists.

Negotiations between ANC and the government coalition began in spring 2011, as the opposition activists who remained in jail by that time were released. However, from the onset of the negotiations both sides viewed them in completely different contexts. The ANC claimed that the main aim of the negotiations was holding snap elections, while the government responded that snap elections were off the table.

The negotiations were not progressing towards any kind of agreement when several activists were detained following a violent incident

involving ANC activists and the police. Most activists were soon released but one of them, Tigran Arakelyan, remained under detention. ANC declared that no dialogue could take place unless he was released. Government officials responded by claiming that Arakelyan was charged with a criminal offence and that they could not affect his release as they had no power over judicial bodies.

In the absence of negotiations, the ANC called for a sit-in at the Liberty Square in central Yerevan on September 30. Most devoted ANC activists stayed through the night in a makeshift tent camp erected on the square, and larger rallies took place during the day. While the police made no attempts to break down the rally, the protesters complained that the authorities attempted to create inconveniences for the protesters, claims denied by law enforcement officials. The sit-in lasted for a week and was called off in early October. Even though the ANC claimed that the sit-in was a success, some opposition supporters were disappointed by the fact that the rallies failed to reach the momentum of similar protests after the disputed elections in February 2008.

In this context, the leadership of the ANC apparently decided that its declared goal of forcing the government to hold snap elections

was unrealistic. While the ANC did not withdraw its calls for snap elections, it announced during a rally on October 28 that it did consider taking part in the regular parliamentary election, due to take place in May 2012. This signified a major change for the ANC, which declared that its new strategy would be to gain a majority in the new parliament and use this majority in order to impeach the incumbent president.

The context in which the ANC's protests were taking place was influenced by rifts appearing in the government coalition, prompted by an interview with Armenia's second president Kocharyan, in which he declared that he did not rule out the option of returning to active politics. In spite of its vagueness, Kocharyan's declaration led to speculations that Kocharyan was planning a comeback in order to replace the incumbent president Sargsyan, inspired by Russian Prime Minister Putin's decision to run for the presidency. This situation of uncertainty provoked internal tensions within the ruling coalition, reportedly leading to the resignation of Karen Karapetyan, Yerevan's mayor and formerly a close ally of Kocharyan (although Karapetyan himself strongly denies this claim). Suggestions that the government coalition is going through a serious internal crisis seem to be confirmed by other high-profile resignations that followed, including resignations of the speaker of parliament and the chief of police. It is difficult to establish to what extent this interpretation reflects actual reality, since developments within the government camp are mostly sealed off from the eyes of the wider public.

IMPLICATIONS: The failure of dialogue between ANC and the government coalition hints that Armenian politics may be returning to a confrontational style, which was its main

characteristic in the run-up to the 2008 elections and its immediate aftermath. As became clear by mid-August, the negotiations were doomed as both sides were locked in a situation in which neither could afford concessions, which could erode their support bases. However, both sides reaped tactical benefits from the negotiations. For the government, they were important in terms of foreign relations, as evidence to the international community that it respected democratic principles and was open for dialogue. In turn, the ANC benefitted from the negotiations since it helped securing an important advantage vis-à-vis other opposition parties. Though ANC has lost some supporters since 2008, it still retains a network of regional cells and a core of devoted activists, which may give the ANC an advantage over other groups that claim to oppose the government coalition. Therefore, the ANC is well positioned to become the frontrunner for the opposition camp in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

However, the situation might change in the case of a breakup of the governing coalition. Tensions between the coalition's largest and second largest members, the RPA and the Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP), have led some analysts to suggest that PAP might leave the coalition. Yet, others argue that an open break between PAP and the incumbent president is unlikely, since a majority of the party's influential members hold important positions in the state hierarchy and business, which might be at risk if they leave the government coalition. Some observers link PAP to Kocharyan, who initiated the foundation of the party when he was president. PAP leaders, however, have repeatedly emphasized in their public statements that their party is an autonomous actor.



Besides, it is not clear whether Kocharyan will support incumbent Sargsyan in the upcoming elections or try to challenge him. Kocharyan and Sargsyan were close allies throughout Kocharyan's presidency (1998-2008) when Sargsyan occupied important posts, including Minister of Defense and Prime Minister. In 2008, some expected that Kocharyan and Sargsyan would replicate the Russian arrangement in Armenia, with Kocharyan becoming Prime Minister. However, these expectations were proven wrong as Kocharyan retired from active political life in 2008. However, rumors about his possible return to active politics and alleged disagreements between the two figures continued to circulate in Armenian political circles.

These rumors received a boost with the news of Putin's planned return to the Russian presidency, prompting suggestions that Kocharyan may also attempt a return to active politics. At this point, however, most analysts believe that it would be difficult for Kocharyan to follow Putin's example, since the nature of relations between Sargsyan and Kocharyan has been completely different from the relationship

between Medvedev and Putin. Sargsyan is firmly in control of all government institutions, and during his presidency Kocharyan never enjoyed an influence comparable to that of Putin in Russia. Therefore, Kocharyan's potential return to active politics might lead to tensions between Kocharyan and Sargsyan. Moreover, this would imply the risk of a breakdown of the government coalition since many members of the existing coalition are still loyal to Kocharyan. Another possible option is a power sharing agreement between Kocharyan and Sargsyan aimed at preserving the unity of the government camp. However, in spite of the speculations about Kocharyan's return, most observers still consider such a scenario unlikely in the current situation since Sargsyan firmly controls most government institutions. Besides, a replay of the Russian scenario in Armenia might lead a negative reaction from the U.S. and European institutions such as the Council of Europe and the EU, something that Armenia's ruling elite is unwilling to risk.

CONCLUSIONS: The breakdown of the negotiations between ANC and the government coalition has increased the tensions in Armenia's political life, both between the opposition and the government and among different groups within the government coalition. It can be expected that the confrontation will become tenser as the May 2012 elections get closer. However, on a brighter note, increased competition both between the opposition and the government and between different groups within the government could also contribute to a situation favorable for truly competitive elections in 2012.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Mikayel Zolyan is an independent political analyst based in Yerevan.

FIELD REPORTS

AFTER RELEASE, TAJIK JOURNALISTS SEEK EXONERATION

Alexander Sodiqov

Two Tajik journalists who were recently convicted in separate trials on charges related to their professional activities have appealed their verdicts. On October 14, reporters Urunboy Usmonov and Mahmadyusuf Ismoilov were handed guilty verdicts by Tajik courts in the northern town of Khujand, but were freed following the verdicts. Despite their release, the two journalists have refused to accept the verdicts and vowed to push for full exoneration in higher courts.

Usmonov, a local correspondent of the BBC's Uzbek service, was detained in June and accused of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT). HuT is an Islamic movement that has been banned in Tajikistan since 2001, primarily because its members are openly critical of Tajikistan's secular government and call for the replacement of Central Asian states with an Islamic caliphate. The only evidence that the investigation had linking the journalist to HuT was the fact that he had in the past met with the group's activists and received samples of religious literature from them. Although meetings with representatives of banned groups do not necessarily mean supporting their cause, in Tajikistan such meetings as well as the possession of unapproved religious literature are often enough to be accused of "extremism" and get a lengthy prison sentence.

According to Usmonov's lawyers and the BBC, his contacts with HuT were limited to his professional duties as a journalist. Local and international media advocacy groups claimed that the reporter was being punished by local authorities for his critical journalism. Thus, the Organization for Security and

Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) announced that Usmonov's arrest was an "attempt to silence a journalist who writes on sensitive topics in Tajikistan." The U.S. and European governments called on the Tajik authorities to ensure a fair trial for Usmonov.

The international criticism and adverse publicity generated by Usmonov's detention prompted the Tajik authorities to be particularly cautious in handling the case. On July 14, he was freed from pre-trial detention but ordered not to leave the country pending a trial. The investigation also dropped the original charges brought against Usmonov. Thus, when he went to trial in mid-August, it was only for failing to inform the authorities that he had met with HuT activists.

On October 14, the provincial court in Khujand found Usmonov guilty and sentenced him to three years in jail. The verdict was largely symbolic because the reporter was released immediately under a nationwide amnesty. After the release, Usmonov told media that the prosecution had not provided any evidence against him during the trial and that he would seek a full acquittal of his conviction. BBC said in a consequent statement that "no evidence of wrongdoing whatsoever emerged during the trial," and that "only a complete exoneration of [the] correspondent is acceptable." The statement also maintained that the Tajik justice system should restore Usmonov's "reputation as a highly respected writer and journalist." On October 27, Usmonov's lawyer filed an appeal against the provincial court ruling in the Supreme Court.

The international attention to media freedom issues in Tajikistan drawn by Usmonov's case have also seemingly contributed to a relatively mild verdict for Ismoilov. Unlike Usmonov, who had had the BBC behind him, Ismoilov was a reporter for *Nuri Zindagi*, an independent weekly with a tiny print run in the northern district of Asht, when he was detained in November 2010. He was charged with extortion, criminal libel, insulting public officials, and inciting "parochial hostility" (*mahallagaro*). However, the editor of *Nuri Zindagi* and Tajik human rights watchdogs claimed that Ismoilov was targeted for criticizing local authorities. In his latest reports, the journalist criticized corrupt local officials, particularly the district prosecutor. The OSCE denounced Ismoilov's detention as a "threatening message to Tajikistan's journalists."

On November 14, the town court of Khujand cleared the reporter of the extortion charges, but found him guilty of inciting "parochial hostility" and insulting public officials, and ordered him to pay 35,000 somoni (about US\$ 7,300) in damages to the government officials he had allegedly insulted. The

court released Ismoilov from custody but banned him from practicing journalism for three years. Following the verdict, Ismoilov announced he would appeal because the court had not provided convincing evidence of his guilt. Besides, Ismoilov's lawyer and Tajik media advocacy groups announced that the fine the reporter was ordered to pay appeared unreasonably high for a country in which almost half of the population live below the poverty line. On October 26, Ismoilov's lawyer filed an appeal against the town of Khujand court in the Supreme Court.

It appears unlikely at the moment that the Supreme Court will grant the two journalists full exoneration. Such an outcome appears unrealistic without a significant amount of international pressure on the Tajik authorities, which would be difficult to sustain after the release of the reporters. Yet, whatever the outcome of the appeal process, the trials of Usmonov and Ismoilov will most likely serve further to entrench self-censorship in the Tajik media community.

AZERBAIJAN IN THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Mina Muradova

For the first time in its history, Azerbaijan has become a member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) after winning the final vacancy on the 15-member body. Analysts speculate on how Baku will use this opportunity to settle the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh which remains unsolved after over 20 years. Azerbaijan claimed the non-permanent seat, awarded to an Eastern European country, on the 17th round of balloting after it scored 155 votes from UN member states in the General Assembly – well above the required two-third majority of states present and voting. The country's victory occurred after Slovenia withdrew its bid at the end of the 16th round. In that round Azerbaijan had obtained 116 votes to Slovenia's 77. A representative of Slovenia

told the General Assembly that while his country believed it would be a good fit for the Council, it was withdrawing its candidacy as the will of the Assembly was clear.

Azerbaijan, which will hold the seat in 2012-13, succeeds Bosnia and Herzegovina. Guatemala, Morocco, Pakistan and Togo filled four other non-permanent seats for the next two years. All non-permanent seats are allocated according to a geographical formula. The five new members will join Colombia, Germany, India, Portugal and South Africa, whose terms end on December 31, 2012, and the five permanent Council members, which each wield the power of veto – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the U.S.

Immediately after the news from New York, President Ilham Aliyev made a public statement where he characterized the victory as “a landmark and historic event in the life of the country,” that marks the 20th anniversary of independence after collapse of the Soviet Union. “This is a very symbolic event. It shows that during 20 years Azerbaijan has demonstrated itself as an independent state, as a glorious country in the world ... This victory is the victory of the Azerbaijani state, the triumph of our policy.” The President expressed gratitude to all countries that voted for Azerbaijan’s candidacy and stressed that Azerbaijan in this organization would “serve the values of the organization; peace, security, democracy and justice.”

Although Baku considers this event as a victory of Baku’s diplomacy, it seems that many European countries did not want to see Azerbaijan in the Security Council. A Western diplomat told Turan news agency that this was due to the uncertain political course of Baku and violations of democratic norms and human rights in the country. In addition, he noted that the West cannot predict how Azerbaijan will act during discussions of the Palestinian case in the UNSC. Following the voting in New York, Azerbaijan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov expressed hope that “the Palestinian issue will be solved before the country will take a seat in the Security Council next year.” At the same time, he noted that Azerbaijan will consult with the Organization of Islamic Conference on such issues.

On October 31, the EU congratulated Azerbaijan on the election and welcomed its commitments to UN values and principles of peace and democracy. The EU Delegation declared its readiness to assist Azerbaijan in meeting the challenges and opportunities related to the country’s new status, and expressed hopes for expanded cooperation and close dialogue on all international issues. The U.S., which according to Deputy Secretary of State William Burns considers Azerbaijan “an important and long-term partner for the U.S.” also welcomed country’s election.

Michael Gunter, a U.S. political analyst on security issues in the Middle East and Eurasia, believes Azerbaijan could be an effective intermediary between the U.S. and the Islamic world, and that the U.S. is eager to cooperate with a secular Muslim-majority state such as Azerbaijan on regulating the situation in the Middle East after the Arab Spring, resolving the crisis in Turkish-Israeli relations, and on finding a solution to the problem of Iran.

To the Azerbaijani public, the main issue is how the country will be able to use its membership in the UNSC for resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To date, the UN has passed four resolutions on the conflict demanding the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories, but none has been implemented.

Ali Hasanov, Head of the Social and Political Department of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration stated that “Azerbaijan is first of all going to put the question of its violated territorial integrity on the agenda of the UN Security Council.” Azerbaijan’s Foreign Minister said the introduction of any initiative requires the preliminary support of the five permanent members of the council, three of which are co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group. “We have not discussed this issue with the permanent members yet, but we will,” Mamedyarov said.

Alexandr Krilov, a Russian analyst on international politics, said that even if Azerbaijan would not be able to use the UNSC as a direct lever for impacting the resolution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani dispute, the tribune of the UNSC will provide new opportunities for Baku to “carry on the diplomatic and information war against Armenia.” Due to Armenia’s passivity, “Azerbaijan has carried out this war over recent years and reached great achievements. Many Azerbaijani books translated in various languages are distributed in international organizations, which present Armenia as an aggressor and occupant,” Krilov told the Armenian news agency. “Thus, Azerbaijan’s membership in the Security Council will open new opportunities for diplomatic attack against Armenia.”

NAZARBAYEV SUPPORTS PUTIN'S EURASIAN UNION BUT REMAINS CAUTIOUS

Georgiy Voloshin

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev was the last of the three presidents of the Customs Union member states – Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus – to react to Vladimir Putin's recent article, published in one of Russia's most read newspapers, about the prospects of creating a full-blown economic entity modeled after the European Union.

In his in-depth review of the economic integration among what in late 1991 became the Commonwealth of Independent States and later within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community, Nazarbayev described the far-reaching goals of multilateral cooperation between former Soviet countries, with full respect for their national sovereignty and identity.

He also warned against any attempts to depict the ongoing process of "rapprochement" between Moscow, Minsk, and Astana, with the possible inclusion of other capitals, as a revival of the Soviet Union. "There is and will be no 'restoration' or 'reincarnation' of the USSR. These are just phantoms of the past, rumors, and speculation. Our views on this issue are convergent in Russia, Belarus, and other countries," Nazarbayev wrote, thus assuaging the portions of his electorate worried about the eventual resurrection of a bloc modeled on the USSR.

Kazakhstan's leader also revisited some of his frequently raised proposals for post-Soviet integration. One of his suggestions is to create a supranational deliberative authority known as the Eurasian Assembly, with headquarters in Astana – the natural capital of the Euro-Asian subcontinent. Concurrently, the Business Council of the Eurasian Economic Community may serve as a launching pad for the further creation of the Eurasian Congress of industrials and entrepreneurs aided by the Eurasian Chamber of industry and commerce uniting Russian, Kazakhstani, and Belorussian

business people. The burgeoning of innovative industries in the Customs Union's trilateral framework is to be buttressed, according to Nazarbayev, by a Joint Program for innovative and technological cooperation in response to the current economic and financial crisis leaving traditional industries with no means to restart their production in more economical ways. Another proposal is to initiate preparations for a future full-fledged currency union based on the Common Economic Area.

Later in the article, Nazarbayev concluded that the "Eurasian Union is a mega-project [which] has all the chances of becoming an organic part of world architecture." But he also reminded his colleagues of the need to set clear and comprehensible goals for the common purpose of pursuing fruitful economic integration in Eurasia.

It was recently announced that with the entry into force on January 1, 2012, of the Common Economic Area, the Customs Union Commission shall be replaced with a new tripartite organ, the Eurasian Economic Commission. This supranational authority, to become operational after July 1, 2012, has already been dubbed by several observers as the "Eurasian analogue of the European Commission," a powerful executive with extensive powers, voluminous jurisprudence and its own jurisdiction. According to the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, the Eurasian Economic Commission will likely have increased staff capabilities, taking the number of permanent personnel up to 1,200, instead of today's 150 currently employed by the Customs Union Commission. Some analysts even speculate that this extremely powerful authority may potentially attract a few ministers from Putin's government, thus asserting Russia's full control over the future functioning of this trilateral organ. Though neither Kazakhstan nor Belarus have yet expressed their views on the formation of such an

executive framework, it is widely believed that they will not be able to ensure an equal footing with Russia through equivalent rights to representation and decision-making.

On this latter issue, President Nazarbayev has been particularly cautious, constantly warning against any hasty decisions concerning the question of all-out economic integration, with the subsequent abolition of customs borders and unification of import tariffs. This is why he made no reference in his article to Prime Minister Putin's words about the hypothetical birth of a Eurasian Union by 2015. The issue of expansion to new member states has also been rather complicated, with Kyrgyzstan wishing to join its northern neighbors inside the Customs Union. Since Russia prepares to become a

WTO member after ending the difficult negotiations with Georgia, the Customs Union and the Common Economic Area risks creating even more confusion. Kazakhstani businessmen have long been complaining about the numerous bureaucratic procedures installed for import and export operations. They are now also facing increased competition from their Russian counterparts endowed with better productive capacities and massively benefiting from their economies of scale. According to experts, prices for most commodities in Kazakhstan are expected to rise even further until they reach the Russian level (for example, an increase of 29 percent for meat in 2011). At the same time, the average income remains stable, if not stagnating.

KOCHARYAN UNLIKELY TO PARTICIPATE IN ARMENIAN ELECTIONS BEFORE 2018

Haroutiun Khachatrian

The return of Armenia's second President Robert Kocharyan to national politics is unlikely to affect the parliamentary elections in May 2012, since Kocharyan is officially a non-partisan and does not enjoy the support of any political party. However, the question of Kocharyan's potential return to politics has attracted significant attention in the Armenian press in the context of pre-election developments in Russia. When the decision that Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin will most likely replace Dmitry Medvedev as Russian President was announced on September 24, many Armenian media outlets argued that a similar arrangement is possible in Armenia, due to the country's close ties with Russia. The argument is largely based on the view that Putin would prefer Kocharyan as Armenian president over the incumbent Serzh Sargsyan, who will run for his second term in 2013.

The discussion was fueled by an interview given by Kocharyan, in itself a rare event, in which he

acknowledged the possibility of his return to "big politics." This puts Sargsyan in a difficult position as his apparently friendly relations with Kocharyan prevents him from openly denouncing any political plans of the former president. For this reason, Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan was selected for the task of expressing the ruling Republican Party of Armenia's (RPA) position on the possible return of Kocharyan. Whereas Serzh Sargsyan is the leader of that party, Tigran Sargsyan is a member of its Board. The Prime Minister told reporters on October 5 that his party will not return to its previous support for Kocharyan, but will now instead support its leader, Sargsyan. However, the message was delivered indirectly and in a very polite manner, ostensibly in an effort to avoid burning any bridges.

First of all, Tigran Sargsyan said that former Presidents never quit "big politics" implying that Kocharyan, who is now a board member of a large Russian company, has continuously participated in

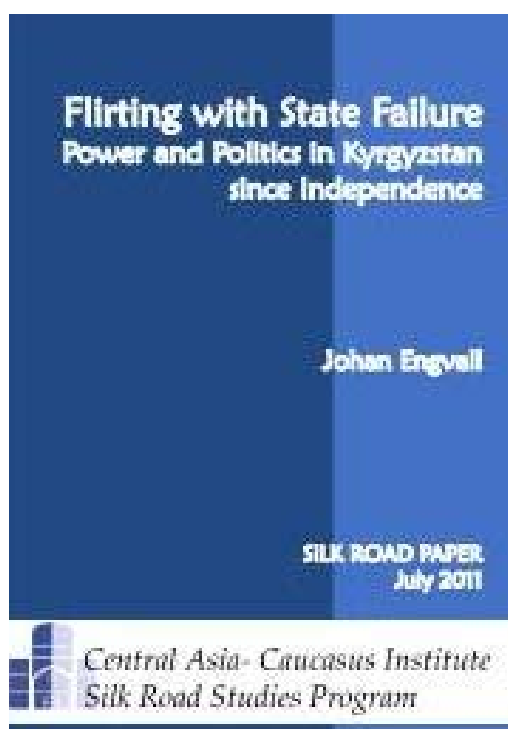
political machinations in Armenia. The Prime Minister went on to say that Sargsyan and Kocharyan have always been close friends and comrades in arms, and will remain so in the future. In the early 1990s, both men took active part in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh and were among the leaders of the region's Armenian forces before moving to Yerevan.

Referring to Sargsyan's service in different ministries 1998-2008 before becoming Prime Minister in 2007, Tigran Sargsyan expressed his confidence that "Robert Kocharyan will not become a competitor to Serzh Sargsyan. Just like Sargsyan supported him during ten years of presidency, Kocharyan will support Sargsyan during ten years." This clearly implies that Sargsyan intends to remain in office until the end of his second term in 2018, and that the RPA will support him.

Tigran Sargsyan made another statement, ruling out the possibility of Kocharyan's return with the help of another party of the ruling three-party coalition, the Bargavach Hayastan (Prosperous Armenia) party. The party was created in 2006, allegedly on Kocharyan's initiative and is according to rumors prepared to quit the coalition and support Kocharyan, in spite of the agreement signed in February 2011 that they will not leave the coalition and will support Sargsyan in the 2013 elections. On

October 5, Tigran Sargsyan said that the ruling coalition, which is Sargsyan's political base, "has enough political will and strength to secure the normal development of the country and carry out the tasks stipulated by the coalition agreement." Tigran Sargsyan was more decisive on October 26, stating that his party was the strongest political force in Armenia and that everyone had to cooperate with it.

The Prime Minister conveyed two important messages in his statements. First, that his party, the RPA, does not support the idea of Kocharyan's return to politics, at least before 2018. Second, that Kocharyan does not have a political power base to participate in the parliamentary elections next year. His potential for creating such a base through Bargavach Hayastan is in practice non-existent, since the party is a member of the ruling coalition and will opt for supporting Sargsyan, according to the Prime Minister. The fact that this statement was made by Tigran Sargsyan, a person largely known so far as an economist, serving as Central Bank Chairman 1998-2008, can hold further implications for Armenian politics. These statements demonstrated that he has obtained a more forthcoming political role and is likely to play a major role in the 2012 and 2013 elections.



New Silk Road Paper:

Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence

By Johan Engvall

This Silk Road Paper analyzes the foundations of politics in Kyrgyzstan, uncovering the key factors of personalities, money, and patron-client networks as means of power.

The Silk Road Paper can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to Paulette Fung at caciz@jhu.edu.

NEWS DIGEST

ASHGABAT BRUSHES OFF RUSSIAN GAS CONCERNS

19 October

Cooperation with Europe on energy matters will continue despite Russian reservations, the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Turkmenistan said. European officials in September announced plans to focus on legal agreements needed for Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to build the Trans-Caspian pipeline system. Russia has cited concern over Ashgabat's energy ties with Europe, including plans to host a section of the Trans-Caspian natural gas pipeline. Moscow says those plans weren't approved by the five littoral countries to the Caspian Sea. Europe noted the September measure was the first time it proposed a treaty to support major infrastructure. Europe is eager to break Russia's grip on the regional energy sector. Turkmenistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement published by the pro-Turkmen government Web site turkmenistan.ru, said Ashgabat would continue cooperation with Europe regardless of Russian objections. "Cooperation with our European partners is developing in a businesslike and constructive way and it will continue," the statement read. A recent survey from British oil field auditing company Gaffney Cline finds Turkmenistan has more than 700 trillion cubic feet of natural gas at its South Yolotan field, enough to satisfy European demand for more than 50 years. Ashgabat blamed Russian gas company Gazprom for a blast at one of its natural gas pipelines in 2009. (UPI)

ONISHCHENKO READY TO PERSONALLY INSPECT GEORGIAN WINEMAKERS

20 October

The Federal Consumer Rights and Human Health Service is waiting for documents from Georgian companies wishing to resume wine deliveries to the Russian market, service head, Russian Chief Public Health Official Gennady Onishchenko told Interfax on Thursday. The service met with a delegation of Georgian winemakers on Wednesday. "They need to present documents describing their products first. We will examine the documents and

visit the factories to check their production cycle. After that, product samples will be presented for certification," Onishchenko said. "If the tests are successful, the products will be added to the register. The deliveries will start after that, and all the products will be checked," he said. "I may visit [Georgia] personally to take a look [at the wine factories]," he said. "I do not rule out insurmountable circumstances may appear if we decide to make a visit," Onishchenko said. (Interfax)

SPECIAL SERVICE CHIEF HOPES ELECTIONS WILL NOT SPARK NEW RIOTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

21 October

Kyrgyz National Security Committee Chairman Keneshbek Dushebayev has described the situation in the country in the run-up to the October 30 presidential elections as quiet. "The population is certainly awaiting the results of voting with a certain degree of concern because there are plenty of people willing to become the republic's president. Different groups are standing behind each candidate, and their interests will evidently clash," he said. "On the whole, I assess the ongoing canvassing campaign in the republic as calm," he said. What counts most for special services is to make sure that "the candidates act in compliance with law," Dushebayev said. "Some of them [presidential candidates] have already said in advance that they will not agree with election results and will bring people into the streets. I count on the wisdom of our people to not allow politicians to push people to war," he said. (Interfax)

CALL FOR TURKMENISTAN, UZBEKISTAN TO JOIN TURKIC ECONOMIC BODY

21 October

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has called on neighboring Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to join a new regional economic body linking Turkic-speaking countries, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. The Business Council of Turkic Speaking

States was established on October 20, at the start of the first two-day summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (CCTS) in Almaty. Nazarbaev, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbaeva, and Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdogan discussed how to promote cooperation between the CCTS's four member-states. All four officials signed the document on creating the business council, the twin objectives of which are to seek new directions for deeper cooperation and to eliminate existing impediments and obstacles in mutual trade and economic ties. Speaking on October 21, Nazarbaev said that "we are all interested in being a full-fledged international organization and we really hope that our Uzbek and Turkmen brothers will join us some day." (RFE/RL)

CLINTON CONTINUES ASIAN TRAVELS

21 October

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's travels in Asia include visits to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the State Department said Friday. Clinton will go to the two countries Saturday and Sunday, following her unannounced visits to Libya, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the department said in a release. In Tajikistan, Clinton will meet with President Emomali Rahmon and Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi to discuss bilateral and regional issues. She also will conduct a town hall-type meeting in Dushanbe. In Uzbekistan, Clinton will have a meeting with President Islam Karimov and Foreign Minister Elyor Ganiev, the department said. She also will go to Tashkent and tour a new General Motors Co. powertrain plant where she will announce the Central Asia Technology Entrepreneurship Program and Techno-Prize Competition. During her stop in Pakistan Thursday, Clinton urged the country's leaders to go after Taliban militants in the mountainous region along the Afghanistan border, *The Wall Street Journal* said. She urged Pakistan to attack the Haqqani network, a group with ties to the Taliban that U.S. officials blame for a number of deadly attacks against American forces in Afghanistan. In Kabul, Clinton assured Afghanistan that the United States wouldn't stop its efforts to create a "strong foundation for an Afghanistan free from interference, violent conflict and one that has a chance to chart its own future." (UPI)

TATARSTAN TO HOLD INTERNATIONAL TURCOLOGY CONFERENCE

21 October

Experts from the region and beyond are gathering in Kazan to discuss how to preserve Turkic languages in a rapidly globalizing world, RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir Service reports. The three-day international Turkology conference is scheduled to open on October 22 in the capital of Russia's Tatarstan republic. The conference is devoted to the 85th birthday of prominent Tatar Turkologist Dilara Tumasheva. Experts from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, China, Kazakhstan, Hungary, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, as well as from Moscow, the Republics of Chuvashia and Bashkortostan, and Perm Oblast, will participate. The conference will also focus on ways to teach Turkic languages using modern technology. Fakhima Khisamova, a linguist at Kazan Federal University, told a press conference on October 21 that preserving languages is becoming one of the most important tasks of contemporary linguistics. "To learn or know a language is, of course, important, but currently, we are focusing on the issue of language preservation," Khisamova said. Khisamova said the conference will also focus on the history of the Turkic languages, structural changes in the Turkic languages, and their grammatical peculiarities. (RFE/RL)

OFFICIALS: CLINTON PRESSES HUMAN RIGHTS IN MEETING WITH UZBEKISTAN RULER KARIMOV

23 October

U.S. officials say Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has urged greater respect for human rights during a meeting with Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov, whose regime has been accused of serious rights abuses. Clinton, who met with Karimov on October 22 in Tashkent, is the highest-ranking American official to visit Uzbekistan since the U.S. in September lifted seven-year-old restrictions on U.S. assistance, including military assistance, to Uzbekistan. The restrictions had been imposed over rights abuses. News agencies quote a U.S. official as saying that in the meeting with Clinton, Karimov pledged to make progress on liberalization and democratic reforms, saying he wants such progress to be seen as a "legacy" of his rule. Karimov has ruled Uzbekistan for more than 20 years. Officials said Clinton also thanked Karimov for Uzbekistan's assistance in supporting U.S. troops involved in the conflict in Afghanistan. Clinton arrived in Uzbekistan following a visit to Tajikistan, where

she said she disagreed with curbs on religious freedom, saying that such restrictions could help promote Islamic extremism by pushing legitimate religious expression underground. (RFE/RL)

LARGEST CHECKPOINT REOPENS ON KYRGYZ-UZBEK BORDER

26 October

The largest international checkpoint on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, Dustlik-Avto, located near the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, reopened on Wednesday, the republic's Border Troops spokesperson told Interfax. The checkpoint had been closed since April 2010, when the previous regime was toppled in Kyrgyzstan. The Dostuk-avtodorozhny checkpoint remained open on the Kyrgyz side only for residents of border regions. An agreement to re-open the largest checkpoint on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border was reached after a meeting between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek border chiefs, the spokesperson added. (Interfax)

DUE TO RECORD HARVEST KAZAKHSTAN CAN EXPORT 15 MLN TONS OF WHEAT, MINISTRY

26 October

"Thanks to the record-breaking wheat harvest this year Kazakhstan can export 15 mln tons of grain," Agriculture Vice Minister Marat Tolibayev told an international conference today. "Kazakhstan has harvested 29.1 mln tons of grain so far, including 24.3 mln tons of wheat. We have gathered this year the record crop," Toliobayev said. According to the Vice Minister positive results in the agrarian sector were achieved partly through the wide use of the potential of the Kazakh agrarian science. It is focused mainly on the creation of high-yielding variety of crops and application of modern water-saving technologies. (Kazinform)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT VISITED EGYPT UNIVERSITY OF ISLAMIC CULTURE IN ALMATY

26 October

Spiritual, religious and ideological guidelines as well as the development of traditional Islam all topped a meeting at the «Nur Mubarak» Egypt University of Islamic Culture in Almaty involving Nursultan Nazarbayev and representatives of the Muslim clergy. According to the International Islamic News Agency (IINA), the agreement on the establishment of this educational institution was signed back in 1993. Later on, the school began

teaching Islamic Studies, which was the first ever speciality of this kind in the country. This year, the state has allocated 100 grants for training students in Islamic Studies. "The most important issue nowadays is the preparation of highly qualified personnel who are able to respond to challenges. Of course, the graduates of our university will be able to adequately respond to this. They are professionals and patriots who love their homeland and their president", Ali Rauf, Teacher, Egypt University of Islamic Culture said. According to Islam Serikbai a first-year student who studies with great interest and pleasure, the level of teaching is very high here. They have built a very good university building this year. Once I have graduated from this university, being a patriot, I want to make my contribution to the development of religion and Islam in my country. Serikbai knows that each year, the university sends successful students to have practice in the Cairo Arabic Language Centre. The Supreme Mufti of Kazakhstan, Absattar Hajji Derbisali, said "we are very thankful to Nursultan Nazarbayev for his constant assistance and his fatherly care. He never divides people into Muslims or non-Muslims, all citizens of Kazakhstan consider Kazakhstan their homeland. Taking care of them is the duty of our President, who has great credibility in the world. We are very grateful to him and we will be following his instructions and we will try to do it with honour". In the middle of October, President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a law on religious activity in Kazakhstan. The preamble of the document acknowledges the historic role of Islam and the teachings of the Hanafi studies and orthodoxy in the development of the culture and spiritual life of the people of Kazakhstan. At the same time, it emphasizes respect for other religions. (Kazinform)

LUKASHENKO SUGGESTS DECIDING ON UZBEKISTAN'S CSTO MEMBERSHIP

26 October

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has said that the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member states should decide on the question of Uzbekistan's further membership in this organization. "I have forwarded my considerations to the Russian president. We need to decide on Uzbekistan, because the triple game led by Uzbekistan does not allow it to stay in the CSTO," Lukashenko said at a meeting of the Council of the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly in Minsk on Wednesday. (Interfax)

ISLAMABAD, ASHGABAT CLOSE TO GAS DEAL

27 October

Turkmenistan and Pakistan are close to reaching a natural gas sale purchase price for a pipeline linking four Asian countries, a government official said. Turkmenistan Deputy Energy Minister Yarmuhammet Orazgulyev led a delegation to Islamabad to discuss pricing for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline. Ashgabat offered a price that was 74 percent of oil parity. Islamabad offered a range of 60-68 percent of oil parity, a government official told Pakistan's Dawn newspaper. That price, the official added, is lower than the 78 percent of oil parity offered by Iran for its bilateral natural gas pipeline planned from the South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf. Ashgabat aims to deliver about 1.1 trillion cubic feet of gas each year through the pipeline when it goes online in 2014. Dawn reports the Iranian pipeline would deliver about 750 million cfd by the end of 2014. India was included in the Iranian gas pipeline option at one point and commentary in Pakistani newspaper The Nation said the Iranian pipeline is all but dead because of an electricity deal between New Delhi and Islamabad. Iran had said it was considering expanding its options for liquefied natural gas deliveries, which don't rely on pipelines. Officials told Dawn that Ashgabat and Islamabad agreed to sign a purchase agreement for TAPI in November. (UPI)

TBILISI AGREED TO NEW PROPOSALS ON RUSSIA'S WTO ACCESSION – GEORGIA MASS MEDIA

27 October

On Thursday, Georgia accepted the new proposals received through Swiss mediators, regarding the resolution of border control issues, which opens up a path to Russia to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), Georgian mass media said, citing the Reuters news agency. The proposals include an electronic exchange of data on trade and international border control between Russia and the two regions that Georgia considers to be part of its territory - Abkhazia and South Ossetia, head of the Georgian delegation at the Geneva talks Sergi Kapanadze said. Earlier it was reported that Georgia had put forward new proposals at its WTO talks with Russia. "Progress in the negotiating process depends on whether Russia will take a constructive position, while the Georgian side hopes that its new

proposals set the basis for that", Kapanadze said. Georgia and Russia resumed their WTO talks in March 2011 through Swiss mediation. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN, SWISS PRESIDENTS DISCUSS WTO

30 October

Swiss President and Foreign Minister, Micheline Calmy-Rey, whose country mediates Russia-Georgia WTO talks, met with Russia's President Dmitri Medvedev on October 30. "Today we will discuss our bilateral relations. But of course there is no reason to hide, that we would like to discuss situation about Russian Federation's accession to the World Trade Organization," Medvedev said at the start of the meeting at his residence outside Moscow. "I would like to thank the Swiss Confederation for mediation efforts, which it offers in order to ease Russia's WTO accession," he added. Micheline Calmy-Rey expressed hope that the meeting would be "fruitful and the results will allow Russia to join the WTO by the end of this year, in December." "We also very much want that to happen." Medvedev responded. Calmy-Rey's visit to Russia comes three days after Georgia announced that it had accepted the compromise proposal tabled by the Swiss mediators. According to the Georgian officials the proposal envisages deploying international monitors from a private company at the both ends of so called "trade corridors" - reference to the breakaway regions, but not inside these regions. Trade corridors will be defined by their geographic coordinates not by names in an attempt to keep a status-neutral approach. A contractor company will be hired by a neutral third party, according to the Georgian side. Russia said it needed several days to review the proposal and to give its response. (Civil Georgia)

GEORGIAN, SWISS PRESIDENTS DISCUSS WTO

31 October

President Saakashvili met with Swiss President and Foreign Minister, Micheline Calmy-Rey, in Batumi on Monday to discuss Russia's WTO entry terms. "She [Calmy-Rey] has informed Mikheil Saakashvili about the Russian position towards the Swiss compromise proposal. The document prepared by the mediator reflects the Georgian side's demands involving monitoring of cargo movement across the border by international observers and electronic exchange of information. A decision of the official Moscow is not yet known,"

the Georgian President's press office said in a brief statement without providing any details. Calmy-Rey arrived in Georgia after holding talks with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev on Sunday. Earlier on October 31, Russian presidential aide Arkady Dvorkovich said that Moscow wanted "only minor changes to the wording" of the Swiss proposal, which has been accepted by Tbilisi last week, Reuters reported. It was not clear on what changes Russia was insisting. Among the Georgian officials who attended the meeting between Saakashvili and Calmy-Rey were Secretary of Georgian National Security Council Giga Bokeria; Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze and his deputy Sergi Kapanadze, who is one of the Georgian negotiator in the Swiss-mediated WTO talks with Russia, as well as Saakashvili's advisor Raphael Glucksmann and Georgia's ambassador to WTO and other Geneva-based international organizations Zurab Tchiaberashvili. (Civil Georgia)

NABUCCO EAGER FOR AZERI GAS

31 October

Getting natural gas from the Shah Deniz 2 gas field in Azerbaijan would be a good "first step" for the planned Nabucco project, a project official said. Azerbaijan is weighing proposals for resources from its Shah Deniz 2 gas field from pipeline consortiums involved in the so-called Southern Corridor of transit networks. Of those, the Nabucco pipeline would be the most ambitious and carry the largest volume of natural gas at an estimated 1 trillion cubic feet per year. Shah Deniz couldn't support Nabucco by itself, however. Christian Dolezal, a spokesman for the Nabucco pipeline consortium, told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty he recognized the difficulties with his project. "Shah Deniz has a certain volume, that's true. But we also see there are additional volumes, first of all, available in Azerbaijan," he said. "And, in turn, this would be enough for a first step for Nabucco." Turkey and Azerbaijan last week signed an agreement to get natural gas supplies to Europe, easing European concerns about its gas relationship with energy-rich Russia. Russia cut gas through conventional routes to Europe through Ukraine in 2009 over contract disputes, forcing Europe to consider other transit options. RFE/RL notes Moscow is considering legal action against any Caspian activity, noting lingering border disputes between littoral states. (UPI)

PROTESTS FOLLOW KYRGYZ ELECTIONS

31 October

Protesters in southern Kyrgyzstan took to the streets Monday after it emerged the former prime minister was the winner of a weekend election. Kyrgyzstan held presidential elections Sunday, the first vote since an April 2010 coup led former President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to flee to Belarus. Following the coup, at least 470 people were killed in ethnic conflicts near Osh and Jalal Abad. Protesters turned out Monday in the streets of Osh and Jalal Abad calling for the election results to be invalidated, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports. Around 1,000 supporters of presidential candidate and Ata-Jurt party leader Kamchybek Tashiyev blocked a highway linking Osh to the capital Bishkek to oppose the election results. They claim the vote was rigged in favor of former Prime Minister Almazbek Atambayev. The country's election commission said Atambayev secured 63 percent of the vote compared with 14.7 percent for opposition leader Adahan Madumarov, a former member of Parliament who draws support from the south of the country, and 14.2 percent for Tashiyev. Rights groups monitoring the situation in Kyrgyzstan note the country has a long way to go to repair ethnic wounds. Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva is ineligible for a second term. Her term expires Dec. 31. More than 60 percent of the eligible voters turned out to vote. (UPI)

TAJIK PRESIDENT, AGA KHAN INITIATE CONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE TO AFGHANISTAN

1 November

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and the Aga Khan have laid the foundation stone of what will be the fifth bridge connecting Tajikistan to Afghanistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. It is the first bridge in the Kulob region of Tajikistan's southern Khatlon Province and will connect the Tajik district of Shuroobod with Afghanistan's Badakhshan Province*. The bridge will be 162 meters long and 3.5 meters wide. The ceremony marking the beginning of construction took place on October 31. The bridge is being financed jointly by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the German government-owned bank Kreditanstalt fuer Wiederaufbau (KfW), which has contributed \$3 million to the cost of building. The construction of the bridge is expected to take a few years to complete. A Shuroobod resident named Rajabmad told RFE/RL that the bridge will help to restore

contacts severed during the Soviet era between people living on opposite banks of the Panj River that marks the border between the two countries. Local residents say some 800 Tajik families from Shuroobod fled Tajikistan when the Bolsheviks arrived in the 1920s, and most of them still live on the Afghan side of the river. It is difficult for them to visit relatives in Tajikistan, a problem officials say the bridge will alleviate. But Shuroobod resident Madhusain Razzoqov told RFE/RL he is worried that the new bridge will be used by drug smugglers who are active in the area. The AKDN has sponsored the construction of two of the other bridges that currently span Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Prince Karim, the fourth Aga Khan, heads the largest branch of Ismaili-Shi'ite followers. His AKDN is one of the most active charitable organizations in Central and South Asia. (RFE/RL)

TRIBAL TRUCE IN EASTERN AFGHANISTAN FALLS APART

1 November

The three-year truce that the Afghan government forced on a violent land dispute in eastern Afghanistan and we described last week as "shaky" from the outset lasted just one day. While the exact casualty figures are difficult to determine, members of a Pashtun clan are said to have been killed and others injured while scores more were detained when they clashed with government troops on October 28. The fighting came one day after young tribal fighters had vacated their respective trenches early on October 27 in the Ghani Khel region of eastern Nangarhar province. Locals had rejoiced at the development because they saw it halting a violent tribal land dispute over a government-owned plain that had claimed the lives of 100 members of the Alisher Khel and Sepah branches of the Pashtun Shinwari tribe. The impetus for the truce was a threat of military action by Nangarhar Province Governor Gul Agha Sherzai on October 25. He was apparently annoyed with holding endless jirgas, or tribal councils, with the two sides. Independent Afghan news agency Pajhwok reported that the Sepah tribesmen returned to Ghani Khel on October 28 where the disputed plain lies south of Nangarhar's capital, Jalalabad. Aminullah Amarkhel accused them of attacking a military base where Sherzai was holding council with the military and police officials. The agency reported that two policemen were injured in the attack but

government retaliation killed seven attackers. Government forces also reportedly captured 65 attackers. Speaking to RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan on October 29, Malik Usman Shinwari, a Sepah leader, claimed that government forces had killed 60 of their fighters and injured 80 others. (RFE/RL)

ISTANBUL CONFERENCE PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR AFGHANISTAN

2 November

All of Afghanistan's neighbors and Western powers were represented at a one-day conference in Turkey, with delegates committing to cooperate and work together to help develop the volatile country. Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rasul said the so-called "Istanbul Process" was driven by his country's needs and represented an important step for the region. Rasul described it as "a process that will allow the countries in the heart of the Asian region to implement important confidence-building measures toward a more effective, broader, and deeper regional cooperation that promotes security, stability, and economic development in our region." Countries represented were from Afghanistan's immediate neighborhood, from the greater region, and from the West, including China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the United States. Delegates from as NATO, the EU, and the UN also were in attendance. The Istanbul conference comes one day after Turkish President Abdullah Gul hosted both Karzai and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, during which the leaders attempted to ease tensions following last month's assassination of former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani. Kabul has accused Islamabad of being behind the Taliban suicide bombing that killed Rabbani, a charge Islamabad denies. The November 1 meeting produced a commitment by Karzai and Zardari to open a joint investigation into the assassination, establishing the air of cooperation that carried over to the conference. While Karzai said the door was closed for now on talks with the Taliban, his foreign minister expressed optimism that negotiation would be possible. "We know that there are people among the Taliban and others that are willing to have peace under the conditions that we have proposed to you," Rasul said. "I am confident and optimistic [that we can] achieve a peace process." (RFE/RL)