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## Contents

### Analytical Articles

- ARMENIA TO BE ADMITTED INTO EURASIAN UNION** 3  
Armen Grigoryan
- AFGHAN PEACE HOPES AMID GREEN-ON-BLUE ATTACKS** 6  
Naveed Ahmad
- WARY OF PROTESTS, TAJIK GOVERNMENT DISPLAYS COERCIVE POWER** 10  
Alexander Sodiqov
- THE SUNDRY MOTIVATIONS OF CAUCASIANS IN UKRAINE** 14  
Emil Souleimanov

### Field Reports

- KYRGYZSTAN'S RESPUBLIKA AND ATA-JURT PARTIES UNITE** 18  
Arslan Sabyrbekov
- PACE'S NEW RESOLUTION CRITIZES THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT** 20  
Eka Janashia
- TAJIKISTAN'S GOVERNMENT BRACES FOR PROTESTS** 23  
Oleg Salimov
- OSCE MINSK GROUP CO-CHAIRS ENGAGE ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN** 25  
Erik Davtyan

# THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

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

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

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

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# ARMENIA TO BE ADMITTED INTO EURASIAN UNION

*Armen Grigoryan*

*Russia's President Vladimir Putin had his way as Belarus and Kazakhstan ratified the treaty on establishing the Eurasian Union, as well as agreed to admit Armenia. An agreement on the main controversy concerning Armenia's admission into the Eurasian Union – the likely establishment of customs controls on the border with Nagorno-Karabakh – has supposedly been reached. Meanwhile, Armenia's parliamentary opposition announced the beginning of a long-term protest movement but refused to criticize Russia's expansionist policies.*

**BACKGROUND:** The treaty on Armenia's accession into the Eurasian Union was signed during the summit of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council on October 10. Just before the summit, the treaty on the union's establishment entered its ratification phase; on October 3, Russia's President Vladimir Putin endorsed the ratification adopted earlier by the State Duma, Belarus's Alexander Lukashenka gave his endorsement on October 9, and on the same day the upper house of Kazakhstan's parliament ratified the treaty, which now awaits President Nursultan Nazarbayev's endorsement. The treaty should enter into force on January 1, 2015.

Armenia's previous attempt to sign the treaty on establishing the union as a founding member was unsuccessful. In May 2014, the presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia required that customs control posts be established on the border between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh (internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan) before Armenia joins the union, and the setting where that requirement was voiced was rather embarrassing for Armenia's president Serzh Sargsyan.

Just before the October 10 summit, some vague statements about a "compromise" on the customs control issue were made but no substantial information concerning the nature of a possible arrangement is yet available.



(Source: [the Presidential Press and Information Office](#))

Meanwhile, on October 10, Armenia's parliamentary opposition organized a rally in Yerevan; different sources put the number of participants at between 12,000 and 20,000. The Heritage Party's leader, Raffi Hovannisian, noted in his short speech that President Sargsyan ignored the people's will by signing the treaty (some Russian media later quoted Hovannisian's statement and misinterpreted the rally as if it had been against joining the Eurasian Union). However, former President Levon Ter-Petrosian, head of the Armenian National Congress (ANC), repeated in

his programmatic address the notion he voiced a few months earlier that Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Union was "irreversible," and also denigrated the opponents of membership calling them "twenty or thirty individuals having convulsions." In general, the prolonged sarcastic exchange between Ter-Petrosian's current supporters in the ANC and his former supporters who are opposed to closer ties with Russia has in the recent months become evidently ill-mannered.

In turn, Gagik Tsarukyan, leader of Prosperous Armenia – the largest party joining the protests – avoided addressing the demonstrators. However, at a press conference a day earlier he said he could consider the possibility of running for president.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Even in the last few days before the October 10 summit, Belarus's and Kazakhstan's skepticism towards Armenia's membership induced some hopes among the government's critics that a veto would be applied. Both Lukashenka and Nazarbayev take their countries' sovereignty seriously and made several strong statements about the unacceptability of introducing a political component in the making of the union, including Nazarbayev's statement that Kazakhstan would depart from it should its independence be threatened. However, Putin's view of the union as a geopolitical project is rather obvious. Considering Armenia's unequivocal loyalty to Russia, its admission into the union essentially means that Moscow gets a second vote

and may eventually attempt to amend the union's statutes.

Taking into account the existing controversies, as well as the uselessness of Armenia's membership from an economic point of view, Lukashenka's and Nazarbayev's agreement to admit Armenia was likely reached by a combination of pressure and incentives from Russia. While Belarus will receive a new financial assistance package, Kazakhstan may have opted not to displease Putin at this moment, keeping in mind recent Russian military exercises in the border regions. At the same time, Minsk and Astana started seeking new opportunities in relations with the U.S. and EU, looking for possible new alliances in order to counterbalance Moscow's ambitions. They clearly understand that the Eurasian Union's perspective is dim in the longer run as there is hardly any prospect of including Ukraine.

Concerning Armenia's membership, hardly any chance remains for preventing ratification of the Eurasian Union treaty despite its inappropriateness in relation to several constitutional provisions. The Constitutional Court is decidedly supportive of the current president, so its approval should be expected. The National Assembly, in turn, will ratify the treaty, probably with most of the opposition's votes in favor. The parliamentary opposition (with the possible exception of about 10 MPs) is not willing to displease Moscow in any way, while civil society structures outside parliament lack financial capacities, access to the media, and

other resources for gathering mass protests.

It remains to be seen to what extent Armenia will relinquish its sovereignty to Russia, and how far it can go in fulfilling Moscow's demands. Examples of possible demands on the international level include changing the framework of conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh with a perspective of advancing Russia's policies; adopting an overtly pro-Russian position concerning Ukraine (in fact, during the summit on October 10 Putin demanded that union members develop a common approach); and a change of policies vis-à-vis Georgia. The latter's ongoing cooperation with the EU and NATO seriously irritates Russia's leaders, and while direct aggression has become less likely, a reactivation of subversive operations can be expected, including the incitement of tensions in Javakheti and other regions with large minority populations.

On the domestic level, Russia could demand that the Russian language be awarded official status. Another demand already expressed on several occasions, even by diplomatic staff, is to limit the freedom of expression for opponents of Eurasian Union membership and Russian policies in general, as well as the activities of Western foundations, in line with Russian practices.

**CONCLUSIONS:** A somewhat optimistic estimation suggests that Putin needed Armenia in the Eurasian Union in order to remain a dominant player within it, and to be able to report a success – the union's enlargement – to

the Russian public in order to alleviate popular discontent over increasing economic and social problems. In this perspective, the decline of the Russian economy due to international sanctions and decreasing oil prices should induce Russian decision-makers to concentrate their efforts on restoring relations with the West and on reviving Russia's economy. However, there is reason to believe that Putin takes the task of reestablishing the Soviet Union in a new form seriously. Such a disposition suggests that Armenia will be used as a tool of Russian domination in the region.

At the same time, the potential for protests in Armenia may grow in the next few months, due to an expected reduction in remittances transferred to Armenia and growing consumer prices. Additional information on the nature of the "compromise" on the customs control issue on the border with Nagorno-Karabakh may also lead to an increase in protest activity. However, bearing in mind the attitude of the most vocal parliamentary opposition and the general population's susceptibility to Russian propaganda, there is little room for developing awareness about Armenia's dependence on Russia as the main source of the country's problems, especially if the opponents of Russian policies are effectively silenced as suggested by Russian emissaries.

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## AFGHAN PEACE HOPES AMID GREEN-ON-BLUE ATTACKS

*Naveed Ahmad*

*On August 5, an Afghan in army uniform opened indiscriminate fire, killing a U.S. army major general besides wounding 15 coalition troops. One German brigadier general and two Afghan generals received non-fatal bullet injuries. Green-on-blue attacks are the most alarming trend in Afghanistan, which has forced ISAF to instruct each soldier to carry a loaded weapon when amongst Afghans. The most recent attack casts a serious shadow over Afghanistan's stability after NATO hands over internal and external security to Afghan security forces. Even the unprecedented news of two opposing presidential candidates reaching a power-sharing deal offers little hope.*

**BACKGROUND:** Green-on-blue attacks refer to rogue Afghan security personnel turning their weapons on the ISAF troops. Also called insider attacks, the incidents are rarely reported as the multinational troops have adopted a policy of non-disclosure. According to conservative figures, over 50 ISAF troops have died in such attacks since 2012. The ISAF figures exclude attacks on contractors, hired for various types of missions in Afghanistan.



(Source: [US Army](#))

Three days after Germany renamed its mission training instead of combat, the soldier that would inflict the heaviest

loss to the multinational as well as Afghan security forces turned rogue at a military academy in Qarga in the outskirts of Kabul. In a related event on August 6, an Afghan police officer poisoned his colleagues in southern Uruzgan province, 370 kilometers south of Kabul, killing seven. Leaving aside casualties among its foreign contractors and fellow Afghans employed in the security services, ISAF has lost over 2,100 troops so far. Prior to the death of Major General Harold Greene, insurgents had managed to hit a C-17 jet carrying General Martin Dempsey with rockets fired from the outskirts of Bagram base on August 21, 2012. Such a daredevil attack could not have been possible without information leaked from within the Afghan military personnel.

After over a decade of operations and training funded by the ISAF member states, the trust deficit has only increased in Afghanistan. In March 2012, Army Staff Sgt Robert Bales killed

16 Afghans, mostly women and children, shooting from a close range with his official automatic weapon.

Night raids and “collateral damage” inflicted by drone attacks are also only fanning the hate. In 2012 alone, reported incidents of green-on-blue attacks claimed the lives of 44 U.S. forces, the highest number recorded since October 2001. However, this year has seen some of the top ISAF personnel injured or killed in insider attacks.

Though the perpetrators of such attacks have rarely been proven to be Taliban operatives, affiliates or sympathizers, the foreign security conglomerate has always given greater credence to the ownership claims of the elusive Taliban chief Mullah Omar. As a result, not only have certain training programs been dropped or cancelled but intense screening regimes have also been imposed on the Afghan security forces.

However, Afghan security experts believe that the hasty recruitment of troops to double the army’s size in 2009 is also partially to blame. Lacking sufficient numbers of interested candidates, the campaign focusing on young and jobless citizens was conducted in popular city squares in the country, without due screening process. Even some NATO officials privately admit that infiltration stood a great chance and the Taliban benefited from the “low hanging fruit.”

**IMPLICATIONS:** Security and political analysts agree that ISAF troops’ night raids and drone attacks have created more trouble than benefits for the much-desired de-radicalization and peace-building processes. U.S.-led

troops invading the homes of suspects at night has been perceived as a lack of respect for Afghan sensitivities regarding privacy and family pride.

The Christian Science Monitor reported in September 2011 that sometimes the number of daily night raids soared to 40 across the war-torn country, affecting some 14,600 families in terms of displacement, harassment or loss of family members from arrests or deaths. ISAF itself admitted to having killed more than 1,500 Afghan civilians from 2010 to 2011. This has led to widespread criticism, including from U.S. allies and former President Hamid Karzai.

The consequence of these recruitment policies and security strategies have not been contained to the battlefield and the Pentagon but U.S. taxpayers have paid a bill of over US\$ 20 billion, spent on training 350,000 Afghan nationals employed in the armed forces as well as other security agencies.

Pakistan’s full-scale operation in volatile Waziristan also has implications for the ISAF troops as well as the newly installed administration in Kabul. According to Pakistani authorities, over 10,000 militants took advantage of the sparse security across the Durand Line, offering a major boost for Mullah Omar’s exhausted militia. Though Afghanistan has continued to accuse Pakistan of cross-border artillery shelling, the ISAF command has so far backed Pakistan in its much-delayed military campaign. Besides the Haqqani group leadership, Mullah Fazlullah who heads one of the three

factions of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan is also taking refuge in eastern Afghanistan. As Pakistan's army is setting up a cantonment and a political package for the integration of semi-autonomous tribal areas, the militants will find it safer to camp in eastern and southern Afghanistan while carrying out hit-and-run operations against Pakistani and Afghan or U.S. troops.

The fundamental question today remains how much of an impact the reduction of the U.S. military footprint would have for Afghanistan's security situation. The September attack near the U.S. embassy suggests the contrary. The Taliban's ability to penetrate deep inside Kabul's exclusive district shed some light on the bleak scenarios likely to emerge after NATO troops leave the country. The number of U.S. troops remaining post-2014 will only be sufficient to conduct strategic operations, rather than counter-terror campaigns.

The emerging security landscape depends largely but not entirely on the number and equipment of Afghan security forces but also their professionalism and commitment to stay neutral in an atmosphere charged with ethnic and sectarian hatred. The National Unity Government in Kabul has tough tests ahead with no time spared for a political honeymoon.

For Washington too, it is time to take a more pragmatic view of Afghan realities. The ISAF troops may leave the country soon but the U.S. military will continue to "advise" the Afghans on counter-terror operations. The local security forces will have limited time

and means to confirm through ground intelligence what U.S. satellite imagery says about a suspect location. The national forces will have to make the Afghans feel that the actual handover of security affairs has been shifted to their compatriots.

The trend of green-on-blue attacks may worsen with the thinning out of ISAF troops, leaving behind the Americans as the most visible targets. The loss of a two-star general recently after dozens of fallen troops in such attacks put a greater strain on the nerves of Pentagon strategists.

**CONCLUSIONS:** If any conclusions can be drawn from the emergence of the Islamic State after years of sectarian violence in Iraq, Washington must learn to give greater space to domestic political elements, empower the local military command to make optimal use of sophisticated equipment available to them and restrain itself to a responsible advisory role. Throughout the Karzai decade in Afghanistan, the U.S. has micromanaged the vital issues while the politicians have acted apathetically. In view of political realities, the National Unity Government must act with greater pragmatism. Alongside the steadily rising Taliban outreach, rogue elements in the Afghan army can pose a threat similar to that emerging in Iraq. To keep matters manageable, Kabul needs to send more positive signals to Islamabad while communicating its concerns through diplomatic channels instead of public statements. While the Obama administration adopts a low profile, the



Afghan government must fill the void by taking bold decisions and discrediting the Taliban allegation that they are puppet rulers.

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# WARY OF PROTESTS, TAJIK GOVERNMENT DISPLAYS COERCIVE POWER

*Alexander Sodiqov*

*An exiled Tajik opposition leader recently promised a mass demonstration against the regime of President Emomali Rahmon who has ruled the Central Asian nation since 1992. Although local analysts shrugged off this statement as lacking credibility, the country's security services reacted with a series of disproportionately harsh measures. Does the Tajik opposition in exile really have enough support and resources to mobilize large-scale popular protest? What explains the heavy-handed approach taken by Tajik security services in preventing the rally?*

**BACKGROUND:** On the last day of September 2014, Umarali Quvvatov, a fugitive businessman-cum-opposition leader called on Tajikistan's population to take part in an anti-government demonstration to be held in Dushanbe on October 10. Drawing on nationalist, Islamic, and democratic discourses at the same time, Quvvatov claimed in a YouTube video that the time was ripe for the people to rise against Rahmon. Claiming that the strongman had ignored an earlier demand to step down, Quvvatov announced that the "people's opposition" was determined to "rid the country of tyranny."

Quvvatov is a former entrepreneur who amassed a fortune by trading oil products, including supplying fuel to ISAF troops in Afghanistan. After one of Rahmon's relatives allegedly took over his lucrative business, Quvvatov fled the country and founded Group 24, an opposition movement seeking to bring down what he calls the "criminal

regime" in Tajikistan. He became an ardent critic of Rahmon, travelling across Russia and mobilizing support for his group among Tajik migrant workers. In late 2012, he was detained in Dubai on Tajikistan's request where the authorities wanted him on charges of business malpractice. After a court in Dubai rejected Dushanbe's demand to have the businessman extradited, he returned to Russia and started a massive campaign to strengthen his profile via social media networks.



(Source: Kremlin.ru, [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Starting on October 1, Quvvatov's call for a mass rally was disseminated via

YouTube, Facebook, and Russian-language social networks, rapidly becoming the favorite topic for discussion among many Tajik users of these media. In several follow-up videos and social media posts, Quvvatov claimed that “thousands” of his supporters in Tajikistan were ready for the demonstration and urged the country’s military and security services to “join the people” when the event starts.

The authorities responded to Quvvatov’s statements with a series of harsh measures. On October 4, riot police blocked off the central square in Dushanbe – where the rally was to happen – and practiced riot control and dispersal techniques, using rubber batons and water cannons. It was also announced that police and all of the country’s security agencies were put on a high alert.

On October 5, in an attempt to halt the dissemination of information about the rally, the authorities blocked local access to more than 200 websites, notably YouTube, Facebook, VKontakte, several news portals, and dozens of anonymizers used to bypass internet restrictions. Tajikistan’s northern Sughd province, home to about one-third of its population, was entirely disconnected from the internet. In key mosques in Dushanbe, imams told thousands of men arriving for Eid al-Adha prayers to be wary of “criminal” groups calling for anti-government protests and threatening peace in the country.

Then, on October 7, the country’s Interior Minister told journalists that

Group 24 was managed by “criminals living abroad, who are wanted in Tajikistan for a number of crimes.” On the same day, the Prosecutor-General’s Office announced that Quvvatov’s statements qualified as “public calls to overthrow the government” and suggested that Group 24 should be banned as an extremist organization.

On October 8, police checkpoints along major roads to Dushanbe were reinforced with armored military vehicles and riot police officers. One day before the rally was supposed to take place, on October 9, the Supreme Court banned Group 24 as an “extremist organization,” warning that members of the group as well as anyone producing or disseminating print, video, or audio materials about the group were subject to criminal prosecution. At the same time, the Prosecutor-General’s Office promised to pardon any Group 24 members who quit the organization. On the same day, the authorities ordered mobile phone operators to switch off SMS services throughout the country and dispatched dozens of security officers to warn students at major universities and high schools in Dushanbe against attending the rally.

There was no demonstration in the Tajik capital on October 10. Within the next several days, the authorities unblocked websites and reactivated SMS services across the country.

**IMPLICATIONS:** It appears that Quvvatov’s claims about an impending anti-government rally were little more than an attempt to mislead potential supporters about the strength of the

exiled opposition. It is also possible that while calling for “Ukraine-like” unrest in Tajikistan, Quvvatov was hoping that the authorities would respond to his calls in a way that would provoke other groups and individuals to join the ranks of opposition. The exiled businessman’s account of why the promised rally in Dushanbe did not happen can hardly be described as credible. Late in the day on October 10, Quvvatov announced that the demonstration had been cancelled after a “reliable source” in the Tajik president’s office told him that China dispatched 800 riot troops to help tackle potential disturbances in Dushanbe.

There is little reason to believe that exiled opposition groups have many supporters in Tajikistan or the capacity to pose a real challenge to the current regime. Political analyst Saimuddin Dustov does not currently see any political force that would have the financial, organizational, and intellectual resources necessary to contest Rahmon’s hold on power. Another local analyst, Sulton Khamad, suggests that although there are many prominent Tajiks living abroad who hate the incumbent regime, they do not have much support within the country, cannot coordinate their activities with other groups, and lack support from foreign governments. It is notable that major domestic opposition groups, including the Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) and the Social-Democratic Party (SDPT), condemned Quvvatov’s call for a demonstration and urged their supporters not to attend the event.

In addition, many analysts maintain that the very idea of anti-government protests is highly unpopular in Tajikistan where the memory of the civil war in the 1990s still haunts the society. Over the last decade, the government has worked hard to persuade the populace that any public expressions of political dissent threaten peace and risk pushing the country back into violence. Following recent protests in Khorog in the country’s east, the government introduced harsher criminal penalties for attending “illegal” rallies, while also making it easier for police to respond to such rallies brutally.

Hence Quvvatov’s promises of a “mass” antigovernment rally in the Tajik capital lacked credibility from the very beginning. Why, then, did the authorities choose to respond so heavy-handedly? Several plausible explanations have been proposed. Some experts maintain that the security agencies did not really take Quvvatov’s statements seriously but that they chose to “overreact” to re-affirm their loyalty to President Rahmon, while also demonstrating their resolve to ward off any assaults on Rahmon’s power to opposition groups. Other analysts hold that the “overreaction” had to do with the fact that political elites in the country lack credible sources of information about political moods and the extent of popular support for opposition groups in the country.

While these explanations may indeed hold some truth, it appears that the Tajik authorities’ heavy-handed approach to the threat of an anti-

government demonstration emanates to a large degree from genuine fear of public protests. First, people at the apex of political power in Tajikistan believe that although the Central Asian country is different from societies in the Middle East or Ukraine, it is not immune from political processes similar to ones that led to the Arab Spring and the toppling of Viktor Yanukovich's regime. A recent wave of anti-government demonstrations in Russia and Hong Kong has reminded Rahmon and his advisors that even the very coercive and technologically savvy states cannot always prevent outbursts of popular protest. Tajik security services seem to be particularly alarmed by the similarities between the techniques used by Quvvatov and those used by protesters in Ukraine, Hong Kong, and Russia. For instance, Quvvatov communicates with his supporters via Zello, a walkie-talkie-like application that allows smartphone users to exchange short voice messages quickly and anonymously. The application was actively used by protesters in Ukraine, Russia, and Venezuela. Also, like opposition leaders in Russia and Ukraine, Quvvatov is very active on social media networks where he finds a large audience that the government cannot control.

Second, the security services which no doubt monitor Quvvatov's online activity must have been alarmed by at least a dozen videos showing the opposition leader's meetings with hundreds of young Tajik migrant workers who are disillusioned and angry at Rahmon's government. These individuals are not afraid of voicing

their criticism on camera, and many videos end with people demanding that Rahmon step down. Thus, the security services might genuinely believe that Quvvatov's group has a considerable support base.

Third, Quvvatov's supporters control major discussion groups on political developments in Tajikistan on Facebook and Odnoklassniki, often steering discussions on these platforms in directions that the authorities are not comfortable with. Although the appearance of broad based support for Group 24 as suggested by these platforms is deceptive and online criticism does not always translate into political action, the authorities seem to (mis)interpret Quvvatov's positive online image as an indication of popular support for his rhetoric.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The Tajik security services' heavy-handed response to a minor opposition leader's calls for anti-government protests demonstrates that the government in this Central Asian country is genuinely afraid of broad-based public unrest. It also demonstrates that while the government understands that even the most coercive states cannot always control popular protests, coercion remains its favorite tool for dealing with any public expression of dissent.

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# THE SUNDRY MOTIVATIONS OF CAUCASIANS IN UKRAINE

*Emil Souleimanov*

*One attribute of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine's Donbas area has been numerous speculations on the involvement of foreign fighters on both sides to conflict. Amid the diverse body of volunteers and mercenaries involved in the war, Chechens and other North Caucasians have received particular attention due to their fame as fierce warriors, and because their involvement in the conflict on the side of pro-Russian forces has constituted solid evidence of Moscow's military engagement in the war. Yet the fact that Caucasian volunteers participate also on the Ukrainian side, and the ambivalence toward the conflict locally in the North Caucasus, demonstrate the diversity of motives and incentives inducing Caucasians to fight in Ukraine.*

**BACKGROUND:** News that Chechens were involved in the Ukraine crisis spread already in March, when a range of news agencies and locals reported of "Caucasian-looking" units deployed in some areas of the Crimean peninsula. Some sources in Crimea spotted Chechens in the eastern Crimean city of Feodosia, identified by their fatigues, equipment, and behavior as members of kadyrovtsy units. Since then, local sources have reported of Chechens in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk on various occasions throughout mid-summer. Video footage from a Donetsk street was released displaying individuals speaking Russian with a heavy Chechen accent.

Soon thereafter, it was speculated that dozens belonging to Chechen-manned units were killed during a failed siege of the local airport. Sources in Chechnya and Dagestan reported that bodies of local men were transported to their homeland for burial. Throughout the

conflict, Chechnya's president Ramzan Kadyrov has made controversial statements. On the one hand, he refused to acknowledge the involvement of Chechens in the clashes, boasting on one occasion that if Chechens had been involved, they would have long taken Kyiv. He has also admitted that he is in no position to make sure there were no Chechen volunteers whatsoever in the eastern Ukraine clashes. On the other hand, Kadyrov has on various occasions explicitly stated his readiness to order the intervention of Chechen units in the Ukraine war against "fascists" should Putin call upon them (see the [06/04/2014 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)).

**IMPLICATIONS:** Journalists in Chechnya and Dagestan have reported on local men being forced to "volunteer" in the Donbas war. According to a local source, Dagestani soldiers in the Buynaksk garrison of the Russian army have been compelled to

join pro-Russian units in eastern Ukraine; those refusing were routinely accused of treason and cowardice and often discharged. Similar situations allegedly took place in other areas of Dagestan, usually confined to the military garrisons stationed in the republic. In the patriarchal Dagestani society, implications of such refusal would put immense social pressure on Dagestani conscripts and officers, many of whom chose to follow the informal instructions and deploy to battlefields in eastern Ukraine. Yet others have withstood the pressure and refused to “volunteer” to a distant war.



(Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

According to Paul Goble, similar mechanisms have been at work in Chechnya, where recruitment offices were set in some areas of the republic. In the Chechen context, a member of the Chechen law enforcement in general and a kadyrovets in particular would, if discarded from military service for whatever reason, become excluded from the protection of his comrades-in-arms. In turn, this would dramatically increase the risk of becoming a target for his or his family’s enemies in blood feud. Given that many kadyrovtsy have been involved in extrajudicial killings, humiliation, and injuring of their fellow countrymen

suspected of providing support to insurgents or because they were relatives of insurgents, this has raised the pressure on would-be volunteers to obey instructions.

A range of sources indicate that dozens of South and North Ossetians have also volunteered to the war. While many North Ossetians appear to have joined due to their feeling of loyalty toward Moscow, South Ossetians may have volunteered in order repay Russia’s support during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Some North Caucasian fighters have revealed in interviews their incentive to become recognized as true Russian patriots in Russian public opinion. Data is scarce regarding the natives of the Northwest Caucasian republics in the Donbas war. We also lack information regarding the extent to which the “forced” volunteers have been promised soldier’s pay for their participation in the hostilities in eastern Ukraine.

Nonetheless, North Caucasians have not only figured in the service of pro-Russian forces. Some have joined to the ranks of Ukrainian forces, and given the lack of leverage on the Ukrainian side, this has taken place on voluntary grounds. Kyiv’s lack of financial resources also suggest that it could not afford to pay mercenaries, and the North Caucasians fighting on behalf of the Ukrainian military are indeed volunteers. Perhaps the most well-known case is the so-called Jokhar Dudayev International Peacekeeping Battalion, a force manned by dozens of predominantly North Caucasian volunteers that was formed shortly

before the active clashes in the Donbas area waned. This unit is commanded by Isa Munayev, a nearly 50-year old brigadier general of the Chechen Army and the military commandant of Grozny, who following the seizure of the Chechen capital city by Russian troops in 2000 migrated to Europe.

According to some reports, this battalion is manned by a relatively large number of Chechens, mostly from émigré communities based in Austria, France, Germany and some other EU countries. In contrast to those with a strong Islamic background who have travelled to Syria, the Chechen youngsters in Munayev's unit are loyal to the idea of a Chechen nation-state, as suggested by the Ichkerian flags waved over the battalion's camps featuring a wolf, the Chechens' totem animal and Ichkeria's national emblem. Munayev and his comrades-in-arms have often referred to the North Caucasian peoples' fight for independence from Moscow, reminding of the UNA-UNSO units, manned by Ukrainian nationalists, which took part in the First Chechen War of 1994-1996 as an incentive for them to aid Ukrainian patriots by voluntarily involvement in the war effort. Aside from Chechens, according to some sources, Dagestanis, Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians, Circassians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and others form the backbone of this battalion.

Aside from this unit, a number of Caucasians have formed part of the Donbas battalion, one of the Ukrainian military's volunteer units that took intense part in the fighting and suffered

most casualties. In this unit, around a dozen Georgians participated, followed by Azerbaijanis, Crimean Tatars, Belarusians, and even a few Russians. Yet no Chechens or North Caucasians whatsoever appear to have taken part in this unit.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Nearly every past military conflict has attracted foreign fighters who sought to join belligerents on the ground due to noble ideals or financial incentives. The Donbas war is no different. Still, the participation of North Caucasians in the war has a number of important implications. First, if the war continues after the current break, more North Caucasians would likely be ordered to join the ranks of pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, and consequent casualties among them would likely spark widespread public discontent and possibly also anti-regime protests among North Caucasians back home. When it became known that dozens, if not hundreds of Russian soldiers had secretly died in Ukraine, this caused public outrage across Russia and most likely contributed to curbing Moscow's expansionist appetite in eastern Ukraine.

Second, even though some North Caucasians might be fascinated by the current turn of Russian nationalism and xenophobia away from them in the direction of Ukrainians, their involvement in the Ukraine war will hardly alleviate the deep anti-Caucasian sentiments embedded in the Russian society for decades. The refusal of many North Caucasians to participate in Donbas hostilities has demonstrated



that their sympathies in the military confrontation are not necessarily on the Russian side. Sporadic interviews with Chechens, Dagestanis and others reveal that – perhaps with the exception of Ossetians – the majority do not consider the Russo-Ukrainian confrontation to be their war.

Third, notwithstanding immense pressure exerted upon Chechens within Chechnya, the Donbas war has remained deeply unpopular among the Chechen youth. Importantly, even though the Chechen resistance has weakened somewhat in the recent years and Kadyrov has used the Russo-Ukrainian crisis to manifest his unlimited personal loyalty to Vladimir Putin and Russia's interests, Kadyrov still needs the fighting-fit Chechen units, particularly kadyrovtsy troops, to be stationed within Chechnya to hedge against the permanent threat of Chechen insurgents who may strike virtually any time.

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## KYRGYZSTAN'S RESPUBLIKA AND ATA-JURT PARTIES UNITE

*Arslan Sabyrbekov*

Recent news about the unexpected union of Respublika and Ata-Jurt parties, both represented in parliament, has generated a wide range of speculations and has given a starting point for the parliamentary election campaign of 2015.

Last week, the official representative of Ata-Jurt, Nurlan Shakiev, confirmed that talks are ongoing between the two parties regarding their unification. In his words, "leaders of the parties have agreed to unite, prior to the upcoming parliamentary elections and all the procedures will be completed by the end of October." The representative refrained from commenting on the form of the new union, but taking into account the ambitions of the two leaders, Kyrgyzstan's political scene might witness the emergence of a completely new political party, capable of mounting a challenge to the current power holders. Both party leaders, Kamchybek Tashiev and Omurbek Babanov, refrain from commenting the issue.

Local political analysts cite the negative developments surrounding both parties over the past four years as a driving force behind the decision to unite. Ata-Jurt's position was heavily weakened by the October 2012 arrest of its three main leaders on charges of attempting to violently overthrow the government. As a result of the court decision, all three served short sentences, lost their

parliamentary mandates and according to the legislation, can no longer compete for an elected office. Furthermore, experts refer to the arrest of Akhmatbek Keldibekov, former Speaker of Parliament, as the most significant loss for the party. Due to his worsening medical condition, the Bishkek court has temporarily released him to get the needed medical treatment abroad and according to local experts, he is not likely to come back.

Unlike the endless criminal cases facing Tashiev's Ata-Jurt party, Babanov's Respublika party has experienced a different problem, namely a serious internal crisis with prominent members leaving and forming their own groups in parliament. All these factors in combination do indicate a need to unite, especially in light of the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2015.

According to the Bishkek-based political commentator Mars Sariev, this unexpected union of two political forces is not driven by ideological commonalities but rather by short term goals, i.e. parliamentary mandates. Babanov's financial resources and his image as a young, ambitious, liberal reformer among some parts of the public, and Tashiev's support in the south of the country, provide strong chances for the new union to succeed in the next elections.

Indeed, the elections of 2010 clearly demonstrated that in the Kyrgyz political context, the parties' financial resources play a more essential role than their ideologies, programs and history. Respublika party, created only months prior to the elections, was able to secure 23 seats out of 120, performing better than one of Kyrgyzstan's oldest political parties, Ata Meken, which according to official figures allocated few financial resources to the campaign and was barely able to pass the threshold. In addition, the current government's inability to adequately address the socio-economic problems and the ongoing crisis in the energy sector will benefit the new union's effort to build a platform in their upcoming election campaign.

Commenting on the new union between the two parties, the United Opposition Movement's leader Ravshan Jeenbekov does not rule out the possibility of it becoming another "White House" project aimed at creating a false opposition. In his opinion, the current coalition government has shown a complete inability to carry out any efficient public sector reforms. The situation in the southern regions of the country is escalating, with its residents facing gas and energy shortages on a daily basis. Therefore, to restore the trust of the southern electorate prior to elections, the state is rehabilitating influential politicians from the south and will use them for their own benefit.

Nevertheless, the latest parliamentary elections with 29 parties rallying for 120 seats demonstrated the essential

importance for different and mainly smaller political forces to unite. Kyrgyzstan's current political landscape suggests that this process is becoming inevitable. So far, Ata Jurt and Respublika are the first parties to declare their plans to unite, but they are surely not the last.

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

## PACE'S NEW RESOLUTION CRITICIZES THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT

*Eka Janashia*

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE) October 1st resolution on "the functioning of democratic institutions in Georgia" spurred debates in both Strasbourg and Tbilisi.

The Georgian Dream ruling coalition along with Michael Aastrup Jensen of Denmark and Boriss Cilevičs of Latvia, the two PACE co-rapporteurs on Georgia, strongly opposed the document while the United National Movement (UNM) opposition party supported it, backed by the majority of Assembly members.

The draft resolution built on a report prepared by the co-rapporteurs as a part of PACE's regular activity to observe the country's performance regarding obligations undertaken upon its accession to the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1999.

Allegedly, UNM members of the Georgian delegation were, through the support of European People's Party (EPP), able to introduce amendments to the initial version in order to make it more critical of the Georgian authorities. As a result, the originally "balanced" report has been changed into a "partisan" one, Jensen and Cilevičs claimed. Jensen termed the product "completely a shame," because PACE should not be taking sides in Georgia's internal politics, but should

instead "try to paint a picture as correctly as it is."

According to the document, despite the peaceful handover of power after the 2012 parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections in Georgia, the arrest and prosecution of almost the entire UNM leadership "overshadowed" the democratic achievements the country has made since.

The document describes the detention in absentia of former President Mikheil Saakashvili, former Minister of Defense David Kezerashvili and former Minister of Justice Zurab Adeishvili as well as the arrest of former Prime Minister and UNM Secretary General Vano Merabishvili, former Defense Minister Bacho Akhalaia and former Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava as regressive moves for Georgia's democracy.

The resolution expresses concerns over the freezing of assets belonging to former government officials' family members and the length of Akhalaia's pre-trial detention, asking the authorities to replace detention on remand with non-custodial precautionary measures. It takes note of the multiple charges filed against the former president as well as the large number of possible instances of criminal conduct on the part of former government officials and emphasizes that no one is above law, but

meanwhile urges the authorities to ensure that their trials are impartial.

In this respect, the resolution recalls the Assembly's reservations regarding the independence of the judiciary and administration of justice in Georgia. While it welcomes positive signals such as the adoption of a comprehensive reform package aiming to establish a truly adversarial justice system, it also notices that the sensitive legal cases against opposition leaders has disclosed "vulnerabilities and deficiencies" of the system. Thus, the Assembly suggests further reforms of the judiciary and prosecution service and recommends the Georgian parliament to achieve a necessary compromise to elect all members of the High Council of Justice.

Another set of concerns refers to an increasingly intolerant and discriminatory attitude especially towards sexual and religious minorities and a lack of measures from all stakeholders – the investigative and prosecution agencies, politicians and institutions with high moral credibility – to examine "hate crimes" and condemn discriminatory sentiments. Regarding minorities, the Assembly also calls on the Georgian authorities to sign and ratify the European charter of regional and minority languages, which remains an unfulfilled commitment of the country since its accession to CoE. The Assembly recommends the government to communicate the charter's provisions to the public through an awareness campaign and ensure the engagement of civil society, media and other interest groups in the

process. As for the deported Meskhetian population, the document underscores the setbacks in granting citizenship to already repatriated persons.

Before the resolution was adopted, PM Irakli Gharibashvili expressed hope that EPP along with other members would not rely on the "groundless allegations" put forward by UNM. Later, commenting the already approved document, he said the amendments to the resolution had been passed because of EPP's "solidarity" with UNM. "The wording that was made in reference to Akhalaia and Saakashvili – I do not deem it alarming. This is yet another attempt by the UNM to fight against its own state, its own people," he said.

Although the Assembly is deeply concerned about "a polarized and antagonistic political climate" in Georgia, the resolution has further fanned the confrontation between GD and UNM. Rejecting political motivations, GD declares that prosecution of former officials is a demand of Georgian people and that it certainly should be met. The head of the human rights committee in the Georgian parliament and one of the GD leaders, Eka Beselia, termed the Assembly's request regarding Akhalaia an attempt to exercise pressure on the independent court.

The adoption of a critical resolution on Georgia signifies that leading European political forces are principally against the marginalization and demonization of UNM, as its disappearance from political scene would enormously

damage democratic processes in the country. On the other hand, GD evidently maintains a tough approach reflected in its indifference to the PACE recommendations regarding the prosecution of opposition party members.

## TAJIKISTAN'S GOVERNMENT BRACES FOR PROTESTS

*Oleg Salimov*

Tajikistan's government initiated yet another set of internet blocking measures in the country on October 4. Several popular social networking websites were blocked for a week following speculations of planned anti-government protests in Tajikistan on October 10. As reported by local media, the northern part of Tajikistan was completely cut out of the internet and access was blocked to Facebook, V Kontakte (the Russian version of Facebook), and several opposition and media websites in the rest of the country until October 11.

The government denies any involvement while internet providers refer to unofficial orders from the Tajik State Communication Services requiring blockage of certain websites. Tajikistan's government recurrently blocks internet and opposition websites during political events and public discord (see the [03/04/2014 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)).

Asomiddin Atoev, the head of Tajikistan's internet providers association, is convinced that the blockage of internet was a preventative measure against opposition "Group 24" which called for a protest action in Dushanbe on October 10.

Dushanbe city police conducted anti-protest exercises on October 4, which coincided with the start of the internet blockage. According to Tajik officials,

the anti-protest exercise is a part of the scheduled routine. During the exercise, police in full military outfit armed with shields and batons circled the main city square Dousti and moved forward dispersing the supposed protest crowd.

At the same time, the Political Advisory Council of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan appealed to its supporters to refrain from attending the planned protest action. The party reminded of the bloody consequences of Tajikistan's 1992-97 civil war, which started as anti-government protests and left about 150,000 Tajiks dead. The Advisory Council also threatened to expel members who will attend the action. A similar plea to the Tajik public was announced by the leader of the Communist Party of Tajikistan Shodi Shabdolov, who also warned about the possibility of protests spiraling out of control and the inadmissibility of another civil war in the republic, while dismissing the idea of unauthorized protest actions.

Soon after the blockage of internet, the Tajik Prosecutor General's office sent a request to the Supreme Court to designate Group 24 as an extremist organization attempting a coup in the country. Two days later, on October 10, Tajikistan's Supreme Court approved the request, designating Group 24 as an extremist organization and banning all its actions and activities in Tajikistan.

Tajikistan's government also accuses the leader of Group 24, Umarali Quvvatov, of fraud, kidnapping, and theft. The case was opened in 2012 with damages estimated to millions of dollars. The investigation of Quvvatov's case is conducted by the Anticorruption agency, infamous for its persecution of persons seen as dangerous to Rahmon's regime, the most prominent of which include Zaid Saidov and Mukhiddin Kabiri. Quvvatov was arrested in December 2012 in the United Arab Emirates at the request of Tajikistan's government. He avoided extradition to Tajikistan and was freed ten months later. Quvvatov lives in exile since 2012 and his exact whereabouts are unknown.

According to Quvvatov, Group 24 is named after 24 Tajik businessmen, politicians, and public figures who founded the opposition organization in 2011, united by the idea of replacing Rahmon and changing the course of political development in the country. However, Quvvatov refuses to release the names of the Group's founders. A staunch critic of Rahmon, Quvvatov states his vision of economic and democratic development in Tajikistan, including reform of the agricultural and taxation sectors, elimination of corruption, improvement of educational system, and revision of international agreements unfavorable to Tajikistan.

Eventually, no unsanctioned event took place on October 10. Group 24 failed to attract Tajiks to the protest action for several reasons. First, there is lack of clarity in whose interests the Group represents. This obscurity hindered

Group 24 from building a platform of supporters in Tajikistan. Second, due to the high level of labor migration (almost one million according to Tajikistan's Ministry of Labor) Tajikistan does not have the unemployed masses that played a significant role during Arab Spring revolutions. Third, Quvvatov, the only known face of Group 24, is not yet perceived as a leader of Tajikistan's opposition. The large opposition parties and groups, including the Islamic Renaissance party, the Communist party, the Tajik Labor Migrants group, and the Tajik Youth for revival of Tajikistan group, all rejected the calls for public protests. Finally, although Tajikistan's government took swift actions to prevent protests, which also included high number of policemen and military vehicles in Dushanbe on October 10, memories of the relatively recent civil war remain a firm argument against engaging in street protests to many Tajiks.



## OSCE MINSK GROUP CO-CHAIRS ENGAGE ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

*Erik Davtyan*

During the first session of the Commission on Improvement of the Constitution of Turkmenistan on August 6, President Berdimuhamedov stated a need to amend and introduce new articles to the country's constitution.

Speaking during the session, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan's chairman Kasymguly Babayev noted that a constitutional reform is a "historical necessity" and assured that the members of his party will run a full scale public awareness campaign on the issue.

The last time Turkmenistan's constitution was amended under the current administration was in September of 2008, when Turkmenistan's 2,500 member legislative body, the Khalk Maslahaty (people's council), was abolished and its powers were transferred to the president and the *Mejlis* (parliament). In addition, amendments were made to reflect the country's commitment to market economic principles, various types of property ownership and principles of democratic development.

In May 2014, President Berdimuhamedov signed a decree "On establishment of the Constitutional Commission and its composition for improvement of the Constitution." The Mejlis Speaker Akja Nurberdiyeva said the creation of this commission on

constitutional reform has gained wide support among the population. Nurberdiyeva pledged that the Members of Parliament will hold meetings and seminars to solicit public opinion on the constitutional reform. "With the development of market economic relations and private entrepreneurship, there is a growing necessity to improve issues of ownership and property relations to bring them up to modern methods and standards," Nurberdiyeva said.

President Berdimuhamedov noted that the Constitution, adopted in 1992, has successfully passed the test of time and that the deep socio-economic transformations or changes the Turkmen nation is undergoing over the course of the latest years need to be written down and regulated by law. "The new articles in the Constitution will not only reflect today's political, economic and social issues, but also address the directions of the near and distant future," said the president. He called for a need to bring the Constitution up to contemporary world standards and noted that the upcoming constitutional reforms are aimed at step-by-step development of socio-political relations and drawing clear lines among the legislative, judicial and executive branches of the government.

The Mejlis will be the main state body responsible for organizational issues

and necessary documents in connection with the upcoming constitutional reform. The President suggested that the Parliament creates two inter-sector committees. The first committee, to be established by the Mejlis' decree will receive, study and categorize the public recommendations to the Constitutional Reform Committee on improving the constitution. While the draft reforms are being prepared, the second committee or Mejlis Working Group will consist of scientists, representatives of ministries, public organizations, and experts and will do a political, legal evaluation on the draft project. The president mentioned that the deep meaning and purposes of the constitutional reform should be explained to the public.

Though the government has not released any timeline for the suggested constitutional reform, some sources claim it will be completed sometime close to the session of Yashulyar Maslahaty (Council of Elders) scheduled for October 20, 2014. Once the reforms are prepared, the draft constitution will be published in all state newspapers and internet websites for public discussion and input. Maysa Yazmuhamedova, Deputy Chairwoman of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan covering culture, TV, and the press was tasked to raise the public awareness through mass media in ways easily understandable to the public.

President Berdimuhamedov also gave specific directives to various ministries in support of the upcoming constitutional reform. Turkmenistan's

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its International Relations Institute, and the Turkmen National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan, were tasked to study whether the upcoming constitutional amendments meet the UN Human Rights Conventions to which Turkmenistan is a signatory, and also suggested that these agencies raise the public awareness of the constitutional reform abroad.

Deputy Chairmen in the oil and gas sector, trade and economy were told to create special working groups that will study the public input related to their respective portfolios. Deputy Chairman Annamuhammet Gochyev covering economy and finance will provide financial support for conducting the constitutional reform and also prepare a proposal for the President's consideration on any possible additions to the constitutional amendments deriving from the economy, banking and finance sectors.

The president also recommended seeking the expert views of the local offices of international organizations on the new constitution draft. Satlyk Satlykov, the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers who covers the transportation and communications sectors in the government, was tasked to make Internet communication widely accessible in receiving public opinion on the draft constitution and Deputy Chairman Sapardurdy Toylyev was tasked with seeking the input of the scholarly community.