

CENTRAL ASIA OBSERVATORY

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Launch of a national unity doctrine

On 26 October the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan adopted the national unity doctrine proposed by its Chairman, President Nazarbayev.¹ The document provides guidelines for the development of national/civil identity in the multi-ethnic context of Kazakhstan (Kazakhs constitute 65% of the population). It suggests the formation of a Kazakhstani nation inclusive of representatives of all minorities living on the territory of the country. Among practical steps are the strengthening of the Assembly and its auxiliary bodies, recruitment of ethnic minority representatives fluent in Kazakh language for civil service positions, use of Kazakh as the official language and Russian as a dialogue language, support of Kazakh and “ethnic” media, etc.

The doctrine provoked a strong negative reaction among Kazakh nationalist groups. They accused the government of trying to eliminate the Kazakh nation by adopting the “American model” of a melting pot. In their view, that would lead to the weakening of Kazakh identity and degradation of the Kazakh language. They threatened to start a hunger strike on 16 December, Kazakhstan’s independence day (the strike was postponed, but there was a demonstration on the central square of Almaty attended by over a thousand of people). The opposition OSDP Azat party denounced the doctrine as empty and poorly prepared and joined the nationalists in their demand to revoke the doctrine. Its leaders pointed to the seriousness of the language problem, stating that in eighteen years of independence, beyond rhetoric, not much has been done to promote use of the Kazakh language.

The public feedback from representatives of ethnic minorities was predictably muted. However, they also expressed reservations about having only one

“state-building” (*gosudarstvoobrazuyushaya*) ethnic group – Kazakhs. The coordination council of Russian and Cossack associations also proposed the creation of parties along ethnic lines.

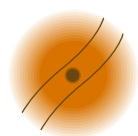
Overall, the doctrine did not break new ground and mostly summarized the already existing policies. The only innovation was the clearly spelled out notion of “Kazakhstani nation” that caused the fury of Kazakh nationalists. The timing of its appearance indicates that most likely it was meant to show the OSCE the government’s enlightened approach to nation-building that combines shaping unified national identity along civil lines and flourishing rights of ethnic minorities. Kazakhstani leadership presented inter-ethnic harmony and tolerance as a result of its wise policies and advertised the promotion of this model as one of its key contributions to the OSCE.

The reaction to the doctrine shows that Kazakhstan’s interethnic concord model might not be sustainable. Discontent among Kazakhs is growing for a variety of reasons: increasing gap between rich and poor, selling of national assets to foreigners, corruption, biased approach to history that overemphasizes the role of President Nazarbayev, insufficient use of Kazakh language, etc.² This trend scares minority representatives who in turn prefer to support the current political regime despite its many deficiencies.

Uranium industry: successes, scandals and undercurrents

In December 2009 the national uranium production company Kazatomprom announced that uranium production would hit 13,500 metric tons in 2009, up 58% from last year, making Kazakhstan the world's leading uranium producer. However, this impressive achievement was tainted by a series of scandals that started with the arrest of the architect

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of Kazatomprom's success, its former president Mukhtar Dzhakishev, in May.

Dzhakishev was accused of appropriating as his personal property 60% of Kazakhstan's uranium deposits worth tens of billions of dollars. The investigation process was criticized both by the human rights and business communities for the methods used by the secret services to obtain evidence, denying lawyers and family members access to the accused, and denying Dzhakishev proper medical help despite his high blood pressure. In the end, the case fell apart and charges made against Dzhakishev during the first trial amounted to much smaller corruption charges such as paying extra salaries to some employees including his bodyguard.

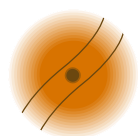
What led to the arrest of one of the country's most talented and effective top managers? The likely explanation is his close relations with two major enemies of the regime – President Nazarbayev's former son-in-law currently in exile in Vienna Rakhat Aliyev and the politically ambitious former chairman of BTA bank now in exile in London. There are also speculations that Dzhakishev's downfall was beneficial for the Russian uranium industry because under his supervision Kazatomprom developed diverse partnerships and was becoming less dependent on Russia. The appointment of Vladimir Shkolnik, with close (and even family) connections with the Russian nuclear company Rosatom, as new head of Kazatomprom, seemed to confirm this. Speculations about Russian interests received another boost when in November an anonymous source posted a video with Dzhakishev on YouTube. In the two-hour recording, Dzhakishev denies the accusations of theft and explains in detail his strategy for developing Kazatomprom. He dwells on the complex relations with Russian uranium producers and his efforts to foster the independence and profitability of the Kazakh company. Dzhakishev points out that after his arrest Russian company Atomredmetzoloto, one of the "daughters" of

Rosatom, struck a deal with Canadian Uranium One and received access to Kazakh uranium (something he had tried to prevent as head of Kazatomprom).³ The video caused an uproar both due to its content and the fact of its appearance.

On 2 December, Dzhakishev's wife made another sensation by claiming that the recording was given to her in September by National Security Committee (NSC) Chairman Amangeldy Shabdarbayev. She told journalists that Shabdarbayev said that he wished the recording to reach the ears of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, but could not arrange this himself. Dzhakisheva made several copies and gave them to people close to the president. The NSC press office immediately denied the claim. However, five days later, Shabdarbayev was removed from his post, and appointed to a less-influential position as "presidential advisor."

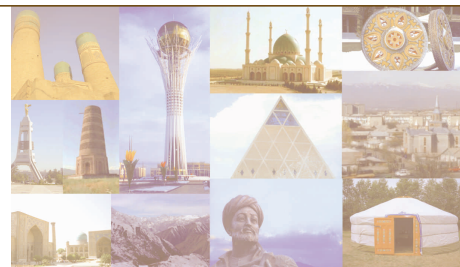
These developments indicate undercurrents in Kazakhstan-Russia "strategic partnership" relations. They also reveal the extent of intra-elite tensions in Kazakhstan, the complex web of interests and the opaque nature of decision-making regarding the country's key assets.

The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (until the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan) is a consultative-advisory body under the President formed in 1995 by Presidential Decree. It is composed of representatives of ethnic minorities living in Kazakhstan and its main purpose is promotion of interethnic concord and social stability. (As a result of the 2007 constitutional amendments, nine seats in the Majilis, lower House of the Parliament, are reserved for members of the Assembly).



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¹ In December President Nazarbayev noted that Kazakhstan is to lend land to Chinese companies for agricultural purposes. This made nationalists even angrier, but also triggered discussions in society about the implications of China's economic expansion.

² Head of Atomredmetzoloto is Vadim Zhivov, son-in-law of Vladimir Shkolnik, current head of Kazatomprom.

³ Before becoming NSC Chairman, Shabdarbayev was head of the Service for the Protection of the President. He was considered one of the few officials most trusted by the President. If Dzhakisheva's story is true, it seems surprising that he could not deliver the video to the President himself.

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