

Highlights

The main events of March-April of this year were the energy crisis and a military operation to destroy the gang of Mullah Abdullah, known as the Tajik "Bin Laden".

On 14 April, during a special military operation in a mountainous area of the Rasht valley, law enforcement agencies destroyed the rebel field commander Mullah Abdullah. During the operation heavy weaponry and aviation was used. Experts believe that the American intelligence agencies provided logistical and technical support to the Tajik military. As a result of the operation, 10 rebels were killed and personnel from the internal affairs ministry also suffered losses.

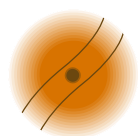
During the 1992-1997 civil war Mullah Abdullah (a.k.a. Abdullah Rahimov) was field commander of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) which opposed the official Dushanbe. After the peace agreement was signed in June 1997, Mullah Abdullah refused to disarm and escaped to Afghanistan where he joined the Taliban. However, a few years later he returned to Tajikistan with hundreds of supporters to continue fighting against the current regime. Tajik authorities accuse Mullah Abdullah of a series of crimes, including the assault on 19 September 2010 on a convoy of Tajikistan's defence ministry. Then, as a result of the grenade attack in the Kamarob gorge of the Rasht district, 28 officers and soldiers of the Tajik army were killed and more than 10 injured. Tajik security forces have repeatedly tried to destroy Mullah Abdullah's gang, but without success. The situation changed after a former UTO warlord Mirzohudzha Ahmad changed sides in exchange for amnesty. With his help, in early January of this year the Tajik military forces defeated the gang of a field

commander Ali Bedaki and killed the elusive Mullah Abdullah.

According to experts, liquidation of Mullah Abdullah's gang improved President Rahmon's image as a tough leader who can cope with domestic opponents. In mid-March, before celebration of Nowruz (Persian new year), Tajikistan experienced a severe energy crisis. This year, winter power supply limits were cancelled earlier than usual. On 20 February, the State energy company Barki Tojik announced the restoration of normal power supply. Three weeks later, a strict regime of limited power supply was reintroduced over the entire territory of Tajikistan. In rural areas, electricity was shut off completely. In cities, limitation lasted for over a month with an extremely negative impact on enterprise performance. In rural areas, limited supply of power has been preserved to date.

The management of Barki Tojik appealed to residents, apologizing to consumers and explaining that the introduction of limited power supply was due to the decrease in the inflow of the Vakhsh River and lower water level in the Nurek reservoir, as well as the failure of irresponsible consumers to pay for the energy they consume. It is nonetheless rumoured that the introduction of the limit is associated with export sales of electricity to Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Dushanbe, near Barki Tojik's main offices, people held a protest meeting. People laid flowers and candles on the fence of the main office of the power company under a sign which said "We mourn the dying energy." The participants held placards saying "Nepotism+Tribalism=Corruption, Poverty, Degradation."

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Internal affairs

The events of March and April show that the Tajik authorities are studying the experience of the Arab revolutions and are trying to prevent the emergence of the Arab scenario in their country. For example, during his traditional meeting with representatives of intellectuals on 19 March, President Rahmon immediately appealed to the people of Tajikistan for peace and harmony, pointing out that political stability should be the primary goal of state and society. The President stressed that Tajikistan is in the early stages of democratization and that democratic reforms should not be rushed. Similar provisions were made at his annual presidential address to parliament on 20 April. The President stressed that there are no preconditions for a revolution and gave instructions to all officials at all government levels to "open the doors of their offices to the common people who might have questions or suggestions." He also promised to increase wages of social workers by 30% as of 1 September this year and also to significantly increase salaries and pensions of civil servants and law enforcement personnel in stages over the next three years.

In his address, the President emphasized youth policy. He also noted that citizens should use every piece of land for vegetable gardens and have a two-year supply of food: "I am reminding you that every home should have a two-year supply of food."

The authorities also implemented a number of popular actions, notably the commutation of the sentences meted out to a number of opposition members and their relatives, arrested during the operation in 2009 in the Tavildara district of the Rasht Valley. The authorities also allowed 20 previously closed mosques to reopen.

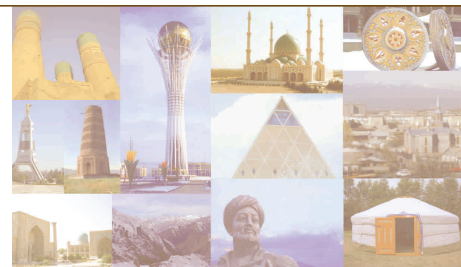
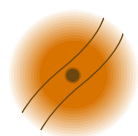
Additional actions to ensure stability were taken. The mayor of Dushanbe ordered the installation of closed-circuit television (CCTV) in all public institutions and

organizations, private enterprises, shops, cafes, restaurants, etc. Installation of street CCTV cameras lasted until April 15. Stores that did not install the external video surveillance cameras were closed. The internal affairs ministry embarked on a radical reform with the help of the OSCE. Interior minister Abdulrahim Kahharov declared the beginning of the process at the signing of the memorandum of understanding between his ministry and the OSCE. There are plans to establish a management group and a permanent working group to create programmes on the development and reformation of the police. It will also develop a new police bill.

The internal affairs ministry is presently conducting an examination of personnel, which has led to the creation of a special commission to examine the professional qualifications of ministry personnel. A significant increase in salaries is expected. In early March, the ministry approved a code of ethics for police officers, regulating all areas of the detention order. These measures were taken to counter the public's deeply rooted distrust of the police owing to corruption, torture and the legal nihilism of law enforcement officials.

There has been a significant tendency to increase limits on freedom of speech in Tajikistan in the year to April, according to a report on freedom of speech prepared by the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NAIMT). The association's monitoring service recorded 84 reports relating to freedom of speech and reflects the media and journalist activity in Tajikistan.

According to NAIMT, three cases of journalists and media being accused of slander and insult were reported in the aforementioned period along with nine incidences of obstruction of professional activities of journalists, seven of limiting access to information, including sources on the internet, 13 incidences involving requirements to protect honour and dignity. "State officials cite various reasons and refuse to



provide information to the media; some officials require journalists to grant permission from the higher authorities or officials,” claim the authors of the report.

In April, the prosecutor general’s office asked Russia to arrest and extradite Dodojon Atovulloyev, journalist and leader of the opposition movement Vatandor (Patriot). In 2008, the prosecutor general’s office initiated criminal proceedings against Atovulloyev, charged with publicly inciting violence with a view to changing the constitutional order of Tajikistan and insulting President Rahmon. The disgraced journalist was supported by Reporters Without Borders, which expressed hope that the Russian authorities would deny the request and not arrest the journalist as per the requirements of international law.

It should be noted that there are 404 newspapers and magazines in Tajikistan, 250 of which are independent. There are eight news agencies (seven independent) and 44 television and radio channels, of which 28 are private. However, Tajikistan produces only one daily newspaper, which is in English. All other publications are printed weekly and even monthly.

The assault on freedom of speech is also reflected in an attempt to restrict the activities of internet providers and mobile phone operators and establish total control over electronic communications. Since 1 May 2011 companies providing telecommunication services are not allowed to access foreign countries independently, but must operate through the intermediary of the state operator Tajiktelekom. The state communication agency justifies this decision on the grounds that it is necessary to ensure security in the country and order the use of radio frequencies. All licenses issued to the telecom operators to implement independent connections were cancelled as of 1 May.

There was a flurry of public comment in response to the new appointment of the President’s eldest son Rustami Emomali to head the customs regulation office to combat smuggling. The management of the Customs Committee made no comments.

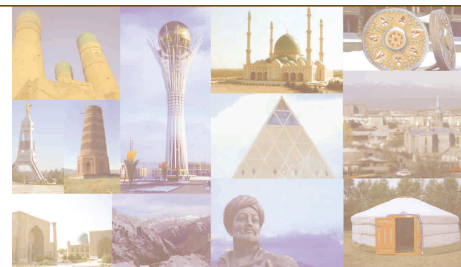
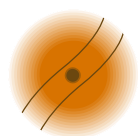
Foreign and international policy

Tajikistan considers the European Union as an important partner and pursues long-term relations geared to mutual benefit, as per the announcement made by President Rahmon on 15 March at a meeting with the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Pierre Morel.

Tajikistan expressed its gratitude for EU support in guaranteeing security in the region, particularly in relation with the protection of state borders and issues involving use of water and energy resources, solving poverty problems and environmental issues. Morel noted that the main thrust of cooperation between the EU and Tajikistan will continue to be health, social protection, agricultural development, private business enterprise and strengthening security. "The European Union commends the role of Tajikistan in matters of peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan," he said.

Morel and the head of the European Commission's Unit for Relations with Russia, Gunnar Wiegand, arrived in Tajikistan on 15 March to participate in the National Dialogue on Water, organized by the Tajik government. Efficient use of water in the region was the main topic of discussion.

Senior EU officials also attended a meeting to discuss issues of border security and border cooperation in Central Asia organized by the Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI) and bringing together major experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, the EU and representatives of the donor community, as well as Japan, Russia and United States. Participants discussed a number of important



issues, among which cooperation among Central Asian countries with international partners to facilitate trade in the region and border management procedures and standards.

According to the participants at the meeting, effective border security and countering drug trafficking are the major challenges facing Central Asia, and both factors directly affect the welfare of EU member countries.

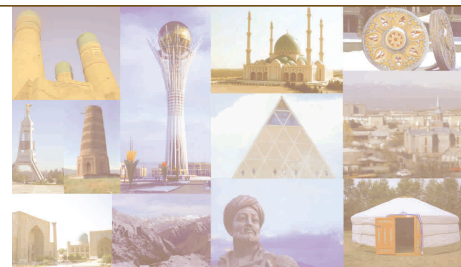
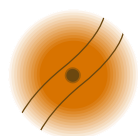
It should be noted that CABSIS is a platform for dialogue and discussion of issues on border security in Central Asia initiated by Austria's interior ministry with EU support. Its main objective is to develop an integrated and sustainable approach to border management in Central Asia in order to improve border security, trade and economic development. As part of the technical assistance program, Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA), the EU is helping to improve institutional reforms in border management, increase trained personnel in Central Asia and continue to fund the modernization of infrastructure along the major trade routes in Central Asia.

In March, Dushanbe hosted a very successful French Week with a festival of French films, concerts, exhibitions and meetings.

Another important event in Tajikistan's sphere of foreign relations was the strengthening of ties with the U.S. while relations with Russia deteriorated further. In late April, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Robert Blake headed an interagency delegation which arrived in Tajikistan for the second round of annual bilateral consultations. The delegation included representatives of the State Department, Defence Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Blake noted that the U.S. attaches great importance to relations with Tajikistan. During the meeting, issues of cooperation in border protection and fighting

extremists, as well as assistance regarding the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan were discussed. Blake outlined the steps the Tajik government can take to attract U.S. companies, which would include simplifying tax laws and fighting corruption. He also noted the importance of religious freedom, press freedom and multi-party systems. During the course of the US-Tajik discussions, issues of bilateral cooperation were considered. Separately, the discussion highlighted key issues for Tajikistan's infrastructure development, transport and energy projects, including CASA-1000 – project of transporting the electricity generated from Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is striking that the Americans previously had almost no interest in Tajikistan's economy. Earlier U.S. interests in Tajikistan were restricted to providing support to the northern network of supply to NATO troops in Afghanistan, to which end five bridges across the river Panj were built. During this last round of negotiations, Blake said, "American companies can participate in projects involving energy and mining in Tajikistan." Improvement of Tajik-American relations is particularly significant in view of the cooling of relations between Russia and Tajikistan. In early March, Dushanbe hosted the first round of negotiations on the harmonization of the new draft agreement between Russia and Tajikistan on cooperation in border issues. This agreement is supposed to replace the current one, which expired at the end of April. Last summer, while discussing the new draft agreement the chairman of the Federal Service of Drug Control of the Russian Federation Viktor Ivanov raised the question of returning Russian border guards to Tajikistan, a prospect that provoked little enthusiasm in the country.

The Tajik side stated that it can cope with protecting the borders and Russia eventually agreed that it is Tajikistan's sovereign right. Russian involvement will be limited to acting as advisor to the Tajik border service. However, the U.S. and the EU are helping to equip and train Tajik border guards. In Tajikistan it



is widely believed that Russia has not given up trying to return its border guards but is simply using other tools of influence.

In early March, a member of the Russian government's international affairs committee Semen Bagdasarov proposed introducing a visa regime with Tajikistan in order to block the drug traffic that goes through the Tajik-Afghan border.

In late March, Russia increased duty on exports of petroleum and gas products to Tajikistan by 5.3%. Analysts believe this is an attempt by Russia to pursue political goals and that it is seeking to regain control over the Tajik-Afghan border.

Economy and business enterprises

Prices of fuel and basic foodstuffs continue to rise in Tajikistan. On average, the price of fuel in Tajikistan increased by 36% because 90% of the fuel imported into the country is Russian. Last year, Tajikistan tried to change fuel delivery routes and fuel was partly imported from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. However, the export opportunities of these countries are limited.

The main investors in the Tajik economy in the first quarter of this year were Iran, Britain, Russia and China. Like last year, the biggest investor in the country is still Iran, whose share of investment in the Tajik economy in the year to March was \$97.4 million, followed by Great Britain with \$42.4 million, Russia \$39.7 million and China \$31.6 million. Tajikistan's agriculture ministry launched a programme of agricultural reforms for the period 2011-2020 which it plans to implement in three phases. The plan is geared to diversifying the agricultural sector, improving the business climate, developing and implementing effective quality control mechanisms and creating favourable conditions for attracting investment.

However, improvements in the investment climate are impeded by several obstacles, one of which is the deterioration of transport conditions. On 1 March, the Uzbek government once again raised the fee for the entry and transit of foreign vehicles and buses that cross the Uzbek-Tajik border. This is the third increase for vehicles in transit from Uzbekistan to Tajikistan so far this year. Uzbekistan has increased transit fees by an average 1.9 times since May 2010. Meanwhile, the government of Tajikistan has unilaterally increased transit fees for Afghan goods by 60% since 1 April, sparking an uproar among Afghan businessmen.

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