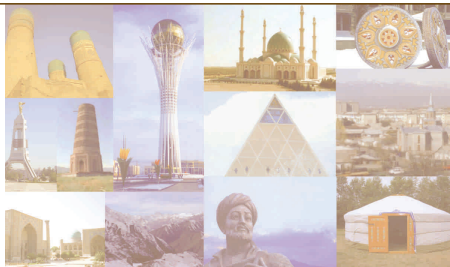


CENTRAL ASIA OBSERVATORY

<http://www.asiacentral.es>



The Central Asia Observatory (CAO) was established in 2007 by three institutions that are interested in the area: Casa Asia, CIDOB Foundation and Royal Institute Elcano



CASA ASIA

MARCH 2012



TAJIKISTAN



JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2012

Bimonthly article

Prof. Saodat Olimova*

Highlights

The main event of January-February was an unusually severe winter with heavy snowfalls and unusually low temperatures. On some days, the thermometer dropped to a record low of -15°C , -25°C in mountainous areas and up to 30°C below zero in Gorno-Badakhshan region. Most of Tajikistan had no electricity. Electricity was supplied without interruption only to the capital, Dushanbe, and only a small share of houses were provided with heating and hot water. Accidents on power lines are commonplace in this period because of frequent overloads. Gas fuel is rarely used because Uzbekistan had increased gas prices and the Tajik authorities restricted gas imports. During the February frosts, school classes were cancelled across the country. Heavy snow blocked traffic on roads and cut off transport links with many areas. Dozens of cars were blocked by snow on mountain passes.

These heavy frosts caused many social and economic problems. Worst off were the poor families, families with many children and the population of the mountain regions. Adverse weather conditions had a serious impact on the economy, causing severe setbacks to agriculture and production stoppages at a number of industries due to lack of fuel.

Internal affairs

Earlier this year, a scandal related to the liquidation of two drug trafficking groups sent shockwaves through the country. One group was controlled by officers, among whom the heads of the drug control agency, relatives of deputy ministers of the interior and the national security committee. In Pamir, an officer of one of the units of the ministry of defence was detained with a kilo of heroin. In northern

Tajikistan, an officer of the ministry for emergency situations was detained for drug trafficking. In southern Tajikistan, police foiled an attempt to transfer about 110 kg of drugs. During the operation, two suspects were arrested, both the sons of famous people in Tajikistan, one a general's son and the other a diplomat's son.

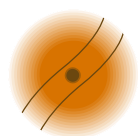
The elimination of these two large drug trafficking groups was a continuation of the fight against drug trafficking. In 2011 four criminal drug groups were exposed in Tajikistan. Employees of the drug control agency say that cases against another 15 active gangs are pending and that all these gangs work with law enforcement officers who cover the criminals.

Another incident that attracted public attention was the crash of a Tajik air force helicopter in Afghanistan and the loss of the helicopter's crew. The helicopter had been hired in Afghanistan by a company called "Supreme Food" for the purpose of providing NATO troops with food. This tragic accident raised a lot of questions, notably as to the legitimacy of using state military helicopters for commercial purposes.

In Tajikistan, political movements and parties continue to grow more active. In February, the creation of the Tajikistan youth party was announced. The leaders of this new party are currently collecting documents for registration with the ministry of justice. At the same time, a group of Tajiks living abroad announced the establishment of "Junbishi milli Tojikiston" (National Movement of Tajikistan - NMT).

The poor state of the health and education systems, frequent scandals associated with the issue of false certificates and diplomas finally aroused the wrath of the authorities. The first step taken by the mayor of Dushanbe was to order the dismissal of the directors

*Deputy Director, Research Center Sharq, Dushanbe.



of 40 of the city's 140 schools and all the head physicians of hospitals and administrators of clinics and hospitals who have been in office for over five years. The regional authorities then ordered a reappraisal of all the managers of educational and healthcare institutions, the aim being to ensure that these structures attract younger and more creative people who can drastically improve the situation.

Along with attempts to tackle these problems by involving younger people, the government has continued to tighten control over religion. In January religious organizations began to be taxed. The state had not hitherto intervened in the finances of religious institutions, nor did it tax them. Now, however, religious organizations including mosques and churches are required to submit lists of priests and other employees plus their salaries to the Committee on Religious Affairs, which will then proceed to levy the corresponding taxes.

The conflict between the government controlled Ulem Council and the influential theologians, the Turajonzoda brothers, is still not resolved. Islamists continue to be persecuted. On 30 January the trial of 34 alleged supporters of the "Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan" (IMU) began in Khujand. All the defendants were born in Isfara, a city bordering with Uzbekistan. The charges include organization of criminal conspiracy; attempt to overthrow the government and public incitement to violent changes of the constitutional order. The defendants acknowledged that in 1992 they had contacts with Islamists from Uzbekistan and agreed to become members of their group. However, they did not know the name of the group and did not participate in any activities associated with this group. The preliminary investigation failed to find evidence of the defendants' involvement in particular crimes.

On 23 February in northern Tajikistan, seven people were sentenced to prison with terms ranging from three to five years for involvement in a banned

organization "Jamoati Tablig". The defendants did not consider themselves extremists. They claim that they were engaged exclusively in promoting the values of Islam and that they had nothing to do with politics or public affairs. At the same time, two residents of Isfara were arrested for illegal religious education of children in the north of Tajikistan.

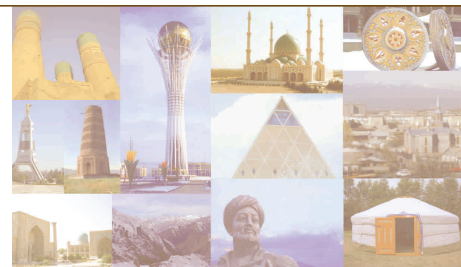
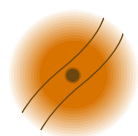
According to the Attorney General, 196 criminal cases were initiated in 2011 against suspected terrorist and extremist religious groups. Human rights activists point out that these cases were usually held behind closed doors, in violation of the laws in force, and that many of the defendants were instantly judged.

However, solutions involving enforcement and tough restrictions have not yet brought any tangible results. On the contrary, they have only reinforced radical religious sentiment among the population. The real causes of radicalization are poverty, unemployment, exclusion and despair. In addition, long prison terms for trumped-up charges turn prisoners into absolute enemies of the state and contribute to spreading radical religious views among prisoners. Prisons have become schools of Islamic radicalism.

Foreign and international policy

Relations with the EU.

The EU mission headed by Dirk Megank arrived in Dushanbe on 23 January to review cooperation between the EU and Tajikistan as well as identifying priority areas of cooperation under the new multi-year financial programme for 2014-2020. The EU representatives met with Tajik senior officials and informed them of their progress with programmes of assistance provided to Tajikistan and discussed prospects for cooperation between the EU and Tajikistan in 2014-2020. The main topics of the discussion were macroeconomic stability, health care, social security, fiscal management, water resources and energy. Mr Megank presented the following EU programmes in Tajikistan: human development



support (≈26 million), for which a financial agreement was signed with the government of Tajikistan on August 2011; a new project to improve the competitiveness of Tajik agriculture (16 million euro), to be signed at the end of the first quarter of 2012; and the forthcoming project to support the public financial management reform (8 million euro).

In addition, the EU initiated an Investment Programme for Central Asia (IFCA), within whose framework it will fund projects in Tajikistan in the areas of energy, water resources and environment. A contract has already been signed for the first project, to which the EU has contributed a grant of 7 million euro. The EU has been conducting activities in Tajikistan since 1992 and annually provides financial assistance to the country amounting to roughly ≈25 million.

Relations with Uzbekistan remain difficult. Uzbekistan continues to block the transit of Tajik goods and delays hundreds of Tajik cars on its territory. But Tashkent has resumed negotiations on the delimitation and demarcation of the border after three years. A meeting of the Tajik-Uzbek intergovernmental commission on delimitation and demarcation of the border took place in Dushanbe on 20-22 February. According to Tajikistan's foreign affairs ministry, 84% of the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was agreed on. The Tajik-Uzbek border is over 1,106 km long.

In early February in Dushanbe, government delegations of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan held a meeting to discuss the delimitation and demarcation of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border and prospects of cross-border cooperation. More than half the Tajik-Kyrgyz border has been delimited leaving 471 km undelimited, a situation that ignites private conflicts on the borders. The total length of the border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is 971 km.

As before, relations between Tajikistan and Russia

are full of contradictions. Russia's anti-Tajik campaign continues. Several Russian politicians made –statements to the media about the genocide of the Russian population prior to the civil war in Tajikistan. In response, Tajikistan's foreign affairs ministry issued a denial, while almost all Tajik newspapers printed a variety of materials from the recent history of the Soviet collapse and ethnic relations in that period.

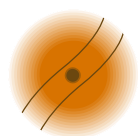
Economy and business enterprise

Fuel supplies remain the most serious problem in these months. The Tajik authorities tried to negotiate a reduction of fuel prices with Russia and simultaneously accelerate the development of their own oil and gas fields. At the same time, Tajikistan is increasing exports of electricity to Afghanistan.

In the early February, prime minister Aqil Aqilov held a meeting in Dushanbe with representatives of Gazprom and asked them to speed up the drilling of wells and to begin producing oil and gas in local fields. In response, Gazprom asked for tax exemptions during the stages of geological exploration and new licenses to explore four other promising fields.

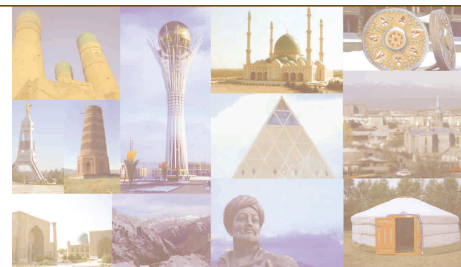
The fact that Tajikistan has oil and gas reserves was known during the Soviet period. Explored reserves of hydrocarbons represent over 113 million tons of oil and 863 billion cubic meters of gas. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, almost all wells were shut and Tajik production at present only meets 2% of the country's total oil and gas requirements. In the short term, Dushanbe may end up with no gas at all and will have to buy it at world prices.

Tajikistan's main gas supplier is Uzbekistan, which says that Tajikistan will be supplied with the gas which is not reclaimed by China and Russia on completion of the Central Asia–China pipeline. As of 1 April Tashkent will increase gas supplies to China to 10 billion cubic meters per year, and from 2014 supply



CENTRAL ASIA OBSERVATORY

<http://www.asiacentral.es>



will be even greater. Tajikistan will therefore have a “starvation” ration of gas and will be forced to buy Uzbek gas at world prices, hence the need to establish its own gas production. Since it is impossible for Tajikistan to develop gas deposits independently, Gazprom has been awarded a license to develop four fields: Rengun, Sargazon, Sarikamis and West Shaambary. However, Gazprom is exploring very slowly owing to the complexity of the terrain and the depth of deposits. Tajik authorities also believe that Gazprom is deliberately delaying the development of fields since it holds a monopoly in the petroleum products market in Tajikistan.

Tajikistan has been talking to Russia about reducing fuel prices. During these negotiations on 13-15 February in Moscow, an indicative fuel balance between Tajikistan and Russia was signed, giving Tajikistan the chance to negotiate an abolition of export duties and receive oil at a discount in the future.

Russian experts believe that the Kremlin will abolish export duties only if the Tajik government agrees to a string of political demands from Russia, among which the return of Russian border guards on the Tajik-Afghan border, free access of Russia's military force to Aini airport and a 49-year rent-free extension for a military base in Dushanbe.

Despite the harsh winter and acute shortage of electricity, Tajikistan increased exports of electricity to Afghanistan in January to 23 million kWh amounting to \$643,000, 54.6% more than in the same period in 2011. Meanwhile, in this same month, Tajikistan generated over 1.57 billion kWh, of which more than 1.55 billion kWh was generated by hydroelectric power stations and the rest by thermal power stations. According to the Statistics Agency, on 1 February there was a total of 179 small hydropower stations, of which only 127 are actually functioning.

Airline scandal. The staff of the state airline Tajik Air expressed a lack of trust in their leadership and management. Pilots publicly accused company leaders of fraud, cheating passengers and threatening their safety. Pilots were outraged by the fact that they were forced to fly on faulty planes and take excess weight, and at the firing of pilots for daring to protest. This was followed by an investigation by the members of the transport prosecutor's office targeting the pilots and technical staff who signed the petition expressing their lack of confidence in the leadership of Tajik Air.

The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Central Asia Observatory (CAO). The institutions that constitute the CAO are not responsible for the use of these contents.

© Central Asia Observatory

