

CENTRAL ASIA OBSERVATORY

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UZBEKISTAN



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Highlights

The period of March-April 2009 in Uzbekistan was politically “normal” in terms of domestic and foreign policy, and relatively calm.

Internal affairs

This period was not so dynamic in terms of events, political decisions or motions. But it was quite traditional in terms of state activism in terms of closely monitoring people, religious and human rights activities. The clearest illustration of this is the case of the ten Muslim men who have been held in detention in Bukhara since December 2008 and who went on trial on 22 April, accused of belonging to an “extremist” organization. Family members said the ten are peaceful followers of the Turkish Muslim theologian Said Nursi, whom the authorities characterize as “a radical Turkish Muslim”. At the Tashkent trial, the followers of Said Nursi were sentenced to 8-12 years in prison. Nine of the men were arrested at the home of one believer while they were reading books and the religious materials confiscated.

It should be noted that in its annual report released on 1 May, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom listed 13 countries, including Uzbekistan, as serious violators of religious freedom and recommended that they be designated as “countries of particular concern”. The countries in this category have engaged in or tolerated systematic, persistent and egregious violations of religious freedom.

Foreign and International Policy

The Treaty on the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in Central Asia came into force on 21 March 2009,

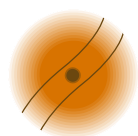
symbolizing the great contribution of Central Asian countries in the strengthening of a non-proliferation regime. Five Central Asian countries -Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan-signed the treaty on 8 September 2006. It should be noted that the first formal Central Asian NWFZ proposal was made by Uzbek President Islam Karimov at the 48th Session of the UN General Assembly on 28 September 1993. The NWFZ Declaration was subsequently adopted by the five countries in Almaty in February 1997.

The adoption of the NWFZ treaty was preceded by long lasting joint work by the UN, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the “nuclear five” group (Great Britain, Russia, US, France and China).

The NWFZ signatories agree that any research, production, storage, other form of acquisition and possession or control of any nuclear weapon and nuclear explosive devices is forbidden in the region.

On 16-22 March, the 5th World Water Forum took place in Istanbul with 30,000 representatives from 130 countries participating, among which the Uzbek delegation. Participants at the forum focused on the problems of rational use of water resources in the context of global warming, climate change, population growth and increased demand for drinking water. It should be noted that at the Bishkek summit of the SCO on 16 August 2007, the Uzbek President defined basic principles of rational use of water resources in Central Asia. The position of Uzbekistan in this sphere -particularly “the non-privatization of water policy”- was supported by the forum’s participants, who emphasized the importance and primacy of international law in this field.

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In the course of the forum, the Foundation for Nature Protection awarded the Uzbek delegation a diploma in recognition of Uzbekistan's leadership in the field of international water policy.

The Treaty on Uzbek-Tajik State Border was finally ratified on 24 March 2009. It was initially signed by Uzbek President Karimov and Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon on 5 October 2002 in Dushanbe. The Treaty provides for the delimitation of most of the interstate border. The next stage of the work of the intergovernmental border commission will be the completion of the delimitation process for the remaining small sections of the Uzbek-Tajik border by the end of 2009, and the demarcation of the border in accordance with international law.

This development is very important for overall regional development because it symbolizes not only a new step in the peaceful conclusion of interstate border disputes but also a very positive shift in Uzbek-Tajik relations, which have been regarded as permanently conflictive or tense at best.

On 27 March, the 14th meeting of the SCO Regional Antiterrorist Structure (RATS) took place in Tashkent. It was attended by representatives of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia and Uzbekistan. The Director of the RATS Executive Committee Myrzakan Subanov reported on the SCO's activity throughout 2008.

Participants at the meeting adopted the Draft Program of Cooperation between SCO member states in the sphere of fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism for the period 2010-2012.

On 1 April, an Italian delegation headed by deputy foreign affairs minister Alfredo Mantika met with members of the Senate and Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss cooperation prospects between the parliaments of the two countries.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan's foreign policy has not been as proactive as expected in certain important spheres, among which the international conference devoted to restoring Afghanistan's economy held in The Hague on 31 March and attended by 72 countries and 20 international organizations. Of the 73 countries invited to the conference, Uzbekistan alone refused to attend. Uzbekistan did not provide any convincing explanation of its reluctance to participate, although some analysts argue that the Uzbek President was thereby demonstrating his response to NATO's failure to respond to the proposal regarding Afghan resolution that he advanced at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April last year.

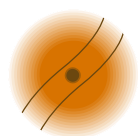
Uzbekistan also avoided attending a ministerial level meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in Yerevan on 16-17 April, sparking speculation among observers regarding the possibility that Tashkent may be planning to quit the organization. Uzbekistan's foreign ministry released a statement saying it was not attending the meeting because it was not necessary. CSTO members in Yerevan discussed cooperation between CSTO and the UN, joint operations to stabilize Afghanistan and counter drug-smuggling from Afghanistan, and the creation of the Collective Forces Rapid Response organization proposed in February 2009 at the last CSTO meeting.

Economy and business enterprise

Several economic developments can be highlighted during this period, particularly in the context of the world economic crisis.

President Karimov signed an order for the creation of the commercial "Agrobank", geared to promoting the development of the agrarian sector of the economy and strengthening economic reforms in this sphere.

The main tasks of the Agrobank are providing credits and other forms of financial support for farmers who



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are engaged in agricultural production, and investing in the modernization, technical and technological innovation of the agro-industrial complex.

The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) is looking for ways to expand its role in Uzbekistan. Talks took place in March focusing on an arrangement under which CNPC and the Uzbek state entity, Uzbekneftegaz, would jointly develop new fields discovered during the course of exploration work. CNPC Vice President Wang Dongjin has announced that exploratory drilling in the Mingbulak oil field in the Namangan province will begin during the second half of 2009. CNPC acquired the Mingbulak exploration license in October 2008. The deposit is estimated to contain more than 30 million tons of oil and annual production is projected at 2 million tons, according to an Uzbekneftegaz statement issued on March 24.

Construction on the Uzbek portion of a natural gas pipeline stretching from Turkmenistan to Northwestern China began recently. When completed, the pipeline will have a capacity of 30 billion cubic meters of gas per year. CNPC manages two oil and gas projects in Uzbekistan and holds exploration licenses for an area covering 34,000 square kilometres.

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