

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 16 NO. 08
23 APRIL 2014

Contents

Analytical Articles

**JUDICIAL TARGETING OF FORMER GEORGIAN OFFICIALS RAISES TENSION
AHEAD OF LOCAL ELECTIONS** 3
Johanna Popjanevski and Carolin Funke

RUSSIA'S DILEMMA IN SOUTH OSSETIA 7
Valeriy Dzutsev

**TURKEY AND THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION: MOTIVES AND
CONSEQUENCES** 11
Stephen Blank

UIGHUR MILITANTS SEEK TARGETS OUTSIDE XINJIANG 15
Jacob Zenn

Field Reports

BERDIMUHAMEDOV SHAKES UP THE ENERGY SECTOR 18
Tavus Rejepova

TAJKISTAN SEIZES ASSETS AFTER FIRTASH'S ARREST 20
Oleg Salimov

GEORGIA'S INTERIOR MINISTRY WARNS OF PLANNED EUROMAIDAN 22
Eka Janashia

NATIONAL OPPOSITION RALLIES IN KYRGYZSTAN 24
Arslan Sabyrbekov

THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASS ANALYST

Editor: Svante E. Cornell

Associate Editor: Niklas Nilsson

Assistant Editor, News Digest: Alima Bissenova

Chairman, Editorial Board: S. Frederick Starr

The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English-language journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing Central Asia and the Caucasus. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports, however authors are encouraged to suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst*, described below.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what authors write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1,100-1,500 word analytical article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, *The Analyst* does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

The Editor reserves the right to edit the article to conform to the editorial policy and specifications of *The Analyst* and to reject the article should it not be acceptable to our editorial committee for publication. On acceptance and publication of the edited version of the article, The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies will issue an honorarium to the author. It is up to the individual author to provide the correct paperwork to the Institute that makes the issuing of an honorarium possible. The copyright for the article or field report will reside with the Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst. However, the author may use all or part of the contracted article in any book or article in any media subsequently written by the author, provided that a copyright notice appears giving reference to the contracted article's first publication by the "Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University, Nitze School of Advanced International Studies."

Submission Guidelines:

Analytical Articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,100 and 1,500 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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.

CONCLUSIONS: 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: <scornell@jhu.edu> and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University
1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.
Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

JUDICIAL TARGETING OF FORMER GEORGIAN OFFICIALS RAISES TENSION AHEAD OF LOCAL ELECTIONS

Johanna Popjanevski and Carolin Funke

Tensions are again rising between the ruling Georgian Dream coalition (GD) and the main opposition party United National Movement (UNM) ahead of the local elections, scheduled for June. Over the last month the government has stepped up its campaign of investigating and prosecuting former government officials, including former President Mikheil Saakashvili and his National Security Advisor Giga Bokeria, who have both recently been summoned for interrogation by the authorities. The targeting of UNM officials carries troublesome implications for Georgia, as they give rise to perceptions of selective justice. Like in Ukraine, political instability in Georgia can open up to national unrest, external manipulation and may ultimately delay the country's Euro-Atlantic integration.

BACKGROUND: A month after sentencing former Prime Minister Vano Merabishvili to five and a half years in prison for abuse of power and corruption, Georgia's Prosecutor's Office summoned President Saakashvili in March for questioning in connection to multiple cases currently under investigation, including the circumstances surrounding the death of former Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in 2005. In early April, Mr. Bokeria, UNM's International Secretary and the former Head of the National Security Council, was also called to the Prosecutor's Office for questioning in connection with an investigation into alleged budgetary misspending by the Council during his time in office.

UNM has voiced strong criticism against the targeting of high-level officials, which it refers to as political persecution and a means to shift focus away from lack of progress in other

fields ahead of the local elections in June.

Merabishvili, Saakashvili and Bokeria are not the first to have been targeted by the judiciary since the GD coalition took power in Georgia after the country's October 2012 parliamentary elections. Less than two years after the peaceful power transfer, 35 former government officials have been charged with criminal offenses; fourteen are still in pre-trial detention. Dozens of other civil servants with links to the UNM have also been charged and sentenced. So far, Merabishvili, who served as Prime Minister for less than four months in 2012 in the Saakashvili-led government, is the highest-ranking former official to have been convicted.

Georgia's Western partners have repeatedly expressed their concern and warned about the use of political retribution and selective justice in Georgia. Already in November 2012,



EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton declared that “there should be no selective justice; no retribution against political rivals. Investigations into past wrongdoings must be, and must be seen to be, impartial, transparent and in compliance with due process.” With reference to the decision by Georgian authorities to call former President Saakashvili for questioning, the U.S. Department of State declared that “no one is above the law, but launching multiple simultaneous investigations involving a former President raises legitimate concerns about political retribution, particularly when legal and judicial institutions are still fragile.”

The government dismisses the criticism, arguing that the ongoing investigations against former officials will ensure that nobody is immune from justice. It points to an ambitious reform agenda aimed at strengthening the judicial system and restore trust in the Prosecutors Office.

Indeed, the GD-led government has faced the challenge of inheriting a relatively weak judiciary marked by high conviction rates, a lack of independence from the executive branch and public distrust. Since taking office, the government has sought to tackle these issues through a number of

measures, including separating the Prosecutor’s Office from the Ministry of Justice (although enabled through the 2013 constitutional amendments, elaborated by the former administration) and reforming the criticized High Council of Justice. The GD administration has highlighted its commitment to judicial reform as a means of consolidating Georgian democracy.

IMPLICATIONS: Yet, it is clear that faster and more determined reforms are needed to strengthen the judiciary and ensure its independence. The Prosecutor’s Office in particular continues to lack transparency and accountability and has been marked by controversies over the last year. Since the power-shift in 2012, the Office has dismissed and replaced almost 100 prosecutors and investigators, in several cases reportedly without explanation. In November 2013, Chief Prosecutor Archil Kbilashvili unexpectedly resigned from his post, allegedly in part due to controversies with hawkish Deputy Prosecutor Lasha Natsvlshvili who later also left the Office. Only six weeks after taking office, Kbilashvili’s successor Otar Partskhaladze also resigned following allegations of his criminal record in Germany.

While it is in the government’s interest to correct mistakes of the past, the timing of the investigations launched against high-profile UNM officials, just ahead of the June elections, raises doubts whether law and justice are the real motivating factors. As the authorities have yet to make clear the criteria used for determining the

prosecutions, perceptions of selective justice are only fuelled.

The context in which the legal actions are being taken adds to such suspicions. The GD coalition, which raised significant public expectations during its election campaign, has yet to find solutions to Georgia's most pressing socio-economic problems. Economic growth has decreased significantly over the last year and unemployment remains rampant. Overshadowing these factors by demonstrating power vis-à-vis the opposition will likely secure support for the government in the upcoming elections.

However, the actions could have serious implications for Georgia. Both the EU and the U.S. have already voiced criticism against the government's selective targeting of former UNM officials. With the recent summoning of both Mr. Saakashvili and Mr. Bokeria, both high-profile personalities with ties to the West, the government displays its determination to carry out its agenda regardless of negative perceptions among its Western allies. In spite of their current preoccupation with the crisis in Ukraine, the EU and U.S. are unlikely to turn a blind eye to what could be regarded as democratic missteps by Georgia. This is troublesome as Tbilisi, in light of current developments in the region, is now strongly dependent on support from its Western allies.

A heavily polarized political scene in Georgia also continues to hamper its democratic agenda. Ever since the Rose Revolution, weak opposition structures and a lack of constructive political

dialogue between the political blocs have been major impediments to democratic progress. Continued political controversies will only cause a setback in democratic processes, which is worrisome given Georgia's Euro-Atlantic ambitions. In tandem with the security threat that the country continues to face from the Russian Federation, an inflamed political climate risks fanning national unrest and political radicalism, which exposes the country to external infiltration.

The domestic controversies may ultimately also expose rifts within the GD coalition itself. While certain factions within the government appear inclined to pursue the investigations to weaken the opposition, others appear significantly less enthusiastic. Again, a politically divided government in Tbilisi becomes vulnerable to manipulation. Moscow is likely to take advantage of such internal divisions and attempt to use it as leverage. In this light, the government has an important task ahead in proving itself as a united and consistent force, both domestically and internationally.

Equally, the UNM will face the challenge of surviving as the leading opposition force. The previously unchallenged party has already undergone the difficult process of constructing a consistent party identity after its defeat in both the 2012 parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections. The loss of key personalities in the UNM leadership is likely to cause a serious setback for the party, which remains dependent on strong front figures.

CONCLUSIONS: Recent events in Georgia demonstrate that the country continues to grapple with shortcomings in terms of the political climate and the performance of the judiciary. Georgian politics remain highly polarized, and the campaign to judicially target UNM officials is likely to drive the political forces even further apart. This is troublesome because a weakened opposition does not work in Georgia's favor; on the contrary, a vibrant opposition has been a missing component in the country's democratization process since the Rose Revolution. Georgia is undergoing a sensitive process of integrating more closely with the West, while it remains exposed to significant security challenges, and it is perhaps more important than ever for the political blocs to engage in constructive dialogue. Given the current developments in Ukraine and their implications for the region, the government needs to promote national unity rather than engaging in actions that will only cause further fragmentation of the political scene, which will only make the country vulnerable to extended provocations from the North.

While there is a need to establish justice and ensure political accountability, it is crucial that the Georgian government handles this process in accordance with transparent and objective standards to avoid further controversies. Selective targeting of high-profile opposition representatives, coupled with provocative statements that disregard the judicial processes, only fuels suspicions of retributive

rather than justice-seeking motives and causes further disintegration of the already heavily polarized political scene. There is reason for all political players in Georgia to show restraint and engage in constructive political debate, or the country risks a troublesome setback in its development processes and exposure to serious security challenges ahead.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Johanna Popjanevski is Deputy Director of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, and currently based in Tbilisi. Carolin Funke is an independent analyst based in Germany. She was an intern with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center in 2013.

RUSSIA'S DILEMMA IN SOUTH OSSETIA

Valeriy Dzutsev

After a long period of political bargaining between Moscow and the Georgian breakaway territory of South Ossetia, the latter managed to obtain unexpected concessions from Russia. The Russian government's desire to implement certain policies in the region is successfully obstructed by local politicians. Russian experts are divided on whether Russia should take similar steps in the South Caucasus as in Ukraine. While some argue in favor of quickly moving on with other territorial gains including South Ossetia, others call for a more cautious approach. The Russian government may keep the problem of Georgian breakaway territories as another foreign policy instrument to influence its southern neighbor in case it proceeds to join NATO.

BACKGROUND: On April 2, South Ossetia's President, Leonid Tibilov, appointed Domenti Kulumbegov as head of the republic's government. Kulumbegov's status had remained ambiguous after he was appointed the acting head of government in January 2014. Throughout 2013, news of simmering bureaucratic battles between Moscow and Tskhinvali emerged regularly. The Russian government attempted to establish greater control over South Ossetia's finances, which Moscow is largely providing, through appointing its own head of government and some other officials. For most of 2013, Russia reduced its funding of the republic to routine maintenance, such as government salaries, halting all infrastructural projects in this impoverished territory. However, South Ossetia's president, with the backing of his entourage, appeared to be surprisingly intractable. This phenomenon is known as the principal-agent problem and reflects the

unanticipated ability of the agent to act in his own best interests, instead of those of his principal.

Eventually, the republic's previous Prime Minister, Rostik Khugaev, was ousted on January 20, 2014. However, instead of replacing him with a Moscow protégé from Russia, another South Ossetian politician – Kulumbegov – was appointed to the post. Even though Kulumbegov was in the 1990s and part of the 2000s employed by the government migration services of North Ossetia, which is part of the Russian Federation, he comes from the Gori region of Georgia and served as South Ossetia's deputy Prime Minister in 2009-2012. Moreover, on April 8, Tibilov reappointed most of the previous members of government that he had criticized for multiple failures when he dismissed them in January. According to Murat Gukemukhov, a reporter of Ekho Kavkaza, "the impression is that



Moscow suddenly withdrew all the demands of the Russian supervisors of the republic about the region's government staffing, as if there had been no lengthy and strenuous consultations on the matter."

Few believe that Moscow allowed the South Ossetians to have their way out of good will. Rather, Russian experts point out that facing a serious foreign policy crisis over Ukraine, Russia is unwilling to jeopardize its relations with its satellite states, such as South Ossetia. Paradoxically, the conflict over the future of Ukraine provided a window of opportunity for the South Ossetian government and improved its bargaining position vis-à-vis Moscow. South Ossetia unexpectedly benefited from the foreign policy troubles of its Russian patrons. For the time being, Moscow is mired in the Ukrainian crisis and is unlikely to engage in any moves that would provoke another conflict in its neighborhood.

Russia's heavy-weight supervisor of South Ossetia, Vladimir Putin's aide Vladislav Surkov, has reportedly withdrawn from the realm of South Ossetian politics, focusing instead on CIS diplomacy. In late 2013, Surkov moved to crack down decisively on South Ossetia's aspirations for greater political leeway. In the end of March,

Tibilov and his entourage met Russia's deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov in Moscow. Surkov was quite tellingly absent from the meeting. Against the backdrop of events in Ukraine, Moscow replaced its initial intention to punish the South Ossetian government for its excessive demands with a less ambitious aim. Moscow now expects the South Ossetian government to hold parliamentary elections in June and provide some semblance of legitimacy and stability as the local population grows increasingly wary of the failing reconstruction efforts and endemic poverty.

IMPLICATIONS: 15 parties are competing for seats in the republic's parliament. The South Ossetian government adopted a tough residential qualification, demanding that candidates to the parliament should have lived in the republic for the past 10 years. The rule is designed to keep out potential opponents to the current authorities, as many influential South Ossetians reside in Russia or Georgia.

Observers note that five parties are the frontrunners, including United Ossetia, headed by emergency minister Anatoly Bibilov. As implied by its name, the party's main goal is to seek South Ossetia's accession to the Russian Federation and to join North Ossetia, which is situated on the northern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains. Bibilov's party has over 2,000 members, which is a staggeringly large number for South Ossetia whose total population comprises no more than 70,000 according to the most optimistic estimates. It is highly unlikely that

Bibilov's party could have garnered such support without Moscow's assistance. Tibilov has repeatedly tried to undermine Bibilov, apparently regarding him as a potential contender for the position of president. South Ossetian authorities ruled out the possibility of holding a referendum on joining the Russian Federation and dismissed some people in the government that were loyal to Bibilov.

Soon after the dubious referendum in Crimea on March 16, the well-known Russian analyst and Caucasus expert Yana Amelina proposed that South Ossetia should also be annexed to the Russian Federation to unite with North Ossetia. Amelina called the case of Crimea a "precedent" for other territories that Russia wants to get hold of. However, the majority of Russian experts cautioned against such hasty moves. Following the acute crisis in Ukrainian-Russian and Russian-Western relations, the talks about Georgia's possible membership in NATO have intensified. Even if Georgia's NATO prospects will not materialize soon, the country is gearing up to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in the fall 2014. Moscow is therefore likely to postpone wielding the threat of annexing South Ossetia to Russia until then.

Despite South Ossetia's complete dependence on Russia for security and finance, the South Ossetian government still managed to acquire a space for political maneuver. Even the fact that the republic's current leader is a former officer of the Soviet KGB did not help Moscow much in establishing

tighter control over this small territory. This does not mean that South Ossetia is in any way opposed to Russia, but Moscow's official recognition of the republic as an independent state and the attention paid by the international community to Russia's current foreign policy moves constrain the methods Moscow can use to rein in this territory. Given the attention that South Ossetia's parliamentary elections have received from Moscow and the growth of particular South Ossetian parties, the Russian government has seemingly decided to change the situation in the republic "democratically," through promoting a Kremlin-friendly party in the parliament and then passing the necessary laws to establish a fuller control of the region's government.

CONCLUSIONS: Moscow's protégés in South Ossetia have capitalized on Russia's preoccupation with Ukraine. The region's government thwarted Moscow's efforts to replace key local politicians with new Russian appointees. The principal-agent problem in South Ossetia has manifested itself in Moscow's difficulties to appoint the "right" people to important government positions in the republic. Moscow's annexation of South Ossetia has been postponed for now, but it is likely to reemerge later this year as Georgia's signature of an Association Agreement with the EU draws closer. It is also plausible that if the tensions over Ukraine do not dissipate and Moscow faces increased opposition from the West, it may choose not to use South Ossetia's annexation as a bargaining chip in

negotiations over Georgia's accession to European institutions.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Valeriy Dzutsev is a Senior Non-Resident Fellow at Jamestown Foundation and Doctoral Student in Political Science at Arizona State University.

TURKEY AND THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION: MOTIVES AND CONSEQUENCES

Stephen Blank

At a recent meeting with Russian President Putin, Prime Minister Erdogan appealed to Putin to include Turkey in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and spare it the troubles of negotiating about EU accession. As Turkey had recently reopened accession talks with the EU, this supposed jest did not go over well in Europe. But Erdogan and his government's seriousness about joining the SCO is not open to question. Erdogan throughout 2013 reiterated his support for Turkey's membership in the SCO. Likewise, Foreign Minister Davutoglu spoke of Turkey's "shared destinies" with other SCO members when Turkey received the status of a dialogue partner of the SCO in 2013.

BACKGROUND: Erdogan's latest statement reopens several questions. Why does Turkey want to join the SCO and in effect become a recognized player in the Central Asian sweepstakes? What are Turkey's policies in Central Asia and how would membership in the SCO facilitate the realization of Ankara's objectives? Do the other members of The SCO want Turkey as a member and how does that possibility affect the SCO and Turkey itself?

Turkey has in the last few years sought to expand its economic, trade and investment profile in Central Asia. Turkish construction companies in 2013 acquired contracts around the world for 235 projects totaling US\$ 23.7 billion, 44 percent of which are in Turkmenistan. Other Turkish projects are similarly underway throughout Central Asia. Turkey has also joined with other governments to sell arms to Central Asian governments.

Erdogan has linked Turkey's economic presence in Central Asia to membership in the SCO, which might lead observers to assign a preeminently economic motive to this ambition. But that answer represents only part of the truth. There is indeed a strongly economic motivation behind the AKP's domestic and foreign policies that have led to Turkey's enhanced global role and Central Asia represents a promising market for further Turkish trade and investment projects, particularly regarding infrastructure. Moreover, Ankara's ambition to become a global energy hub has, if anything, grown now that the Southern Corridor to Europe, in the form of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline or TANAP, goes from the Caspian Sea through Turkey to Europe. In that context, improving ties with Central Asian states could ultimately foster Turkish contracts and potential future pipelines to bring Central Asian energy to Europe through Turkey.



However, Turkey's interests appear to go beyond economics and ideological instruments of influence complement economic power. In this context, some observers have discerned tendencies towards neo-Ottomanism in Turkish foreign policy. These tendencies comprise rhetoric from some political quarters that call for an expansive Turkish foreign policy embracing all the areas that once were part of the Ottoman Empire. But in the case of Central Asia, which was never part of that empire, such tendencies are more properly located within the rhetoric of the Pan-Turkic movements of the early 20th century. Though these movements utterly failed to create a pan-Turkish political bloc; their ideas and rhetoric have survived. Even so, it is difficult to find their trace in Turkey's actual diplomacy and foreign economic policies.

Another source of "ideological" power might be new or renewed efforts to advocate a kind of Turkish model in Central Asia, tested in 1992-93 under utterly different circumstances and promoted by Washington at that time. Yet, this movement too utterly failed. Turkish power was at that time insufficient to affect geopolitical or economic outcomes in the Caucasus not to mention Central Asia, and Central

Asian states resented the patronizing tone of Turkey's diplomacy that attempted to create an "elder brother" status for itself. This history might affect Central Asian states' current attitude towards a Turkish attempt to join the SCO, but again it is difficult to find traces of this mentality in public Turkish policy.

IMPLICATIONS: Turkey undoubtedly hopes to gain enhanced standing in Central Asia by becoming a member but it is by no means clear that the SCO can take it in or wants to do so. Membership issues have proven to be extremely difficult as India, Pakistan, and Iran have all tried to obtain membership several times with no result. And they are SCO observers, considerably more than dialogue partners. Indeed, Turkey did not receive an invitation to the last SCO summit in Kyrgyzstan, which is indicative of the lack of interest in inviting it as a member. Both Beijing and Moscow were quite noncommittal when asked about Turkey's desire to join the SCO despite Moscow's close ties with Ankara.

While Central Asian states have reservations about Turkey becoming an overbearing member; it is also possible that they might welcome another major actor to balance or dilute Chinese and Russian influence. However, in that light it is quite unlikely that either China or Russia would welcome a potential economic and political competitor into the SCO. Turkey's membership would complicate Russia's policies in the Caucasus and it is not clear that Turkey shares the other

members' definitions of terrorism given its position in Syria and its large and vocal communities of Circassians and other refugees from the North Caucasus.

Turkey would likely oppose Russian energy proposals in the SCO given its determination to open up the Caspian to further energy transfers to Europe. Likewise, it is unlikely to support China's use of the Silk Road program to convert Central Asian states into economic dependencies on China. If the primary motive of Turkey's desire to join the SCO is to find new avenues for projecting economic power through enhanced trade and infrastructural investments in Central Asia related to energy, it is almost certain to clash with both Russian and Chinese policies.

It is also difficult to see what Turkey gains through membership in the SCO; it may indeed turn out to be worth less than Ankara believes. Rather than being an effective security provider, the SCO constitutes a forum for the management of China's rising power as expressed in Central Asia. The SCO has served to create a kind of drapery behind which the mutual rivalry, mistrust, and suspicion between Russia and China concerning each other's regional policies may be decorously concealed. But that hardly benefits Turkey. Neither does membership do much to advance security in Afghanistan for anyone, including Turkey. In previous crises in Central Asia, the SCO played virtually no role as a security provider or manager.

Furthermore, it is by no means clear that SCO membership would benefit

Turkish influence in Central Asia. Anyone who wants to play a major role in the region must be ready to spend immense amounts of money for an uncertain return. Indeed, the U.S. and NATO are pulling out of Afghanistan and Central Asia. Inasmuch as other members of the SCO view Turkey, albeit probably wrongly, as a stalking horse for Western interests, they are not likely to accord it enhanced standing in the region beyond a nominal status even if it gains membership in the SCO. And it remains an open question whether Turkey truly has the resources to play any kind of significant political role in the region beyond that of an investor.

CONCLUSIONS: Turkey should grasp that gaining membership in the EU, an opportunity that has again become possible, even if it requires arduous efforts on its part, far outweighs the uncertain benefits of membership in the SCO both economically and politically. Economically both the EU and Turkey would gain immeasurably from membership and Turkey could play a stronger role in its immediate neighborhood with the EU behind it. These issues could include Syria, the Levant in general, and even possibly Cyprus, issues that are of much more direct and immediate consequence to Turkey. The EU may frustrate Erdogan but it is not clear what Central Asia really offers Turkey other than the mirage of influence.

Similarly, if Turkey's ambition to be an energy hub persists it should be interested in Europe more than in

Central Asia. It will be unclear for a long time whether Central Asia's huge reserves can be redirected from their current paths to the southern corridor to Europe through Turkey. Russia and China would undoubtedly mount serious campaigns to counter any diversion to Turkey. On the other hand, Kurdish, Iraqi, and now possibly Iranian energy could be redirected through Turkey to the West, especially if the Iranian nuclear question moves towards resolution.

Undoubtedly Turkey stands to make a lot of money in Central Asia, but it is by no means clear that it needs membership in the SCO to achieve that goal. Ultimately, membership in the SCO may not only be a bridge too far, it may also be a mirage that diverts attention away from projects and goals that are both nearer to home and more rewarding in the short and long-terms.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Stephen Blank is a Senior Fellow with the American Foreign Policy Council.

UIGHUR MILITANTS SEEK TARGETS OUTSIDE XINJIANG

Jacob Zenn

On March 1, six men and two women from China's Xinjiang Province ran into a train station in Kunming, Yunnan Province and stabbed 29 people to death. This was a rare example of a terror attack in southwestern China. It occurred only five months after a family of three from Xinjiang rammed their car into a gate in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, killing several tourists. The Uighur-led Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which now functions like the "spokesman" for Uighur militants in Xinjiang praised both the Kunming and Tiananmen attacks, but refrained from claiming direct responsibility. Meanwhile, an organized insurgency largely independent of the TIP is brewing in China, which benefits from the TIP's propaganda.

BACKGROUND: The motive of the March 1 train station attack in Kunming may be related to an incident in October 2013, when several dozen Uighurs were arrested at the border between Yunnan and Laos. They were most likely trying to seek asylum or escape arrest in China because several of them were involved in a June 2013 clash in Hotan, Xinjiang. In that clash, several dozen Uighurs were killed and several Chinese police officers stabbed to death after the officers arrested an imam, which led to large protests.

Less than two weeks after the attack in Kunming, the TIP released a statement through its media wing, Islom Awazi [Voice of Islam], featuring an Uighur commander and two armed and veiled fighters. The commander called the attack an "expensive offer" to China and warned China to end its "cruelty" in "East Turkistan," which is the name that Islamist militants use to refer to Xinjiang. The style, quality and message of the video were consistent with previous TIP videos, and the

commander has appeared in other videos. This suggests the video was authentically from the TIP.

Like the Kunming attack, the attack in Tiananmen Square in October 2013 was likely motivated by personal grievances. The father who drove the car into the gate in Tiananmen Square, for example, reportedly paid for the construction of a new section of local mosque near Kashgar. However, he failed to obtain the necessary permits, so the government tore it down, which fed his desire for revenge. TIP leader Abdullah Mansour praised the Tiananmen attack in a video from Islam Awazi, calling it a "jihadi operation" and the result of an Uighur "awakening" after 60 years of Chinese oppression.

In addition to the Islom Awazi's release of the TIP statements on Kunming, Tiananmen, and dozens of other attacks, it has also released videos of the religious leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU),



Abu Zar al-Burmi. In 2013, al-Burmi sat with Kazakh and Russian-speaking TIP militants and warned in fluent Uzbek language (with a Fergana dialect) that China is the next “number one enemy” after America. More recently, in February 2014, al-Burmi also said it is acceptable to behead “Chinese Buddhists.”

IMPLICATIONS: The expansion of attacks from Xinjiang, where in 2013 more than 150 people were killed in about 10 violent incidents, to Yunnan and Beijing shows that tensions in Xinjiang are not staying confined to that province any longer. Rather, Uighur militants are applying pressure on the Chinese government by carrying out attacks in eastern China that have a greater effect on China’s national economy, including tourism, and that reduce the sense of security of the Han Chinese population and create mistrust between Hans and Uighurs. In addition, the increasing numbers of attacks that gain international media coverage provide the TIP with more opportunities to be heard, while marginalizing mainstream Uighur organizations that publicly disavow violence.

The Tiananmen and Kunming attacks also show distinct similarities. The attackers in both incidents came from

the two most violence-ridden regions of Xinjiang – Kashgar and Hotan – and were likely motivated by revenge. While the two attacks are exceptional because they took place outside of Xinjiang, the style of attacks resembled other attacks in Xinjiang in 2012 and 2013 that the TIP claimed and that involved suicide bombings on three-wheeled carts and mass stabbings. This suggests a possible link between the TIP, the recent attacks in Tiananmen and Kunming, and other attacks in Xinjiang.

The Abu Zar al-Burmi videos also raise the possibility that the TIP and IMU will not only coordinate propaganda, but also attacks in Afghanistan, Central Asia and China. For the last decade, the IMU leadership has been based in Pakistan, but in recent years it has carried out complex and large-scale bombings and assassinations in northern Afghanistan, including Panjshir, Faryab and Takhar Provinces. Al-Burmi, who is an ethnic Rohingya but a Pakistani national, could reinforce his militant credentials by claiming an attack on the Chinese government, which he blames for the Myanmar government’s mistreatment of Rohingyas.

Meanwhile, a Reuters journalist interviewed TIP leader Abdullah Mansour in March 2014 via satellite phone in Pakistan. He reported that Mansour told him that the TIP would carry out attacks using weapons more complex than daggers in the future. The journalist also cited Pakistani experts, who say that the TIP’s 200 to 300 militants are now based in areas of

northern Pakistan and northern Afghanistan very close to China's borders with those two countries, which may facilitate TIP attacks in China.

CONCLUSIONS: With the help of the TIP, the Uighur secessionist movement has developed both the propaganda machine and attack strategy of other Islamist insurgencies that model themselves on al-Qaeda, such as the IMU. There remains a strong likelihood that there will be more attacks in China outside of Xinjiang, especially on symbolic targets or public places such as train or bus stations or airports. Future attacks may also involve more sophisticated weaponry than the attacks that have employed daggers as the primary weapon since 2012.

However, the increasing number of civilian deaths in attacks that the TIP praises and claims may necessitate the TIP and other Uighur militants to carry out more precision and targeted operations, such as assassinating government officials – both Uighur and Han – or citizens who they perceive are “collaborating” with the government. The overall trajectory of the TIP and its future strategy may also depend on TIP coordination with other Central Asian militant groups, especially the IMU. Abu Zar al-Burmi, in particular, appears to have taken a particular interest in the TIP.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Jacob Zenn is an analyst of Eurasian and African Affairs for the Jamestown Foundation and non-resident research fellow of the Center of Shanghai Cooperation

Studies (COSCOS) in Shanghai. He testified before the U.S. Congress on Islamist Militant Threats to Central Asia in February 2013.

BERDIMUHAMEDOV SHAKES UP THE ENERGY SECTOR

Tavus Rejepova

On April 10, Turkmenistan's President, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, chaired a special meeting with the leaders of the oil and gas sector of Turkmenistan. Following a report by the Chairman of the Supreme Control Chamber, Batyr Atdayev, on the results of his agency's audit of the Ministry of Oil and Gas Industry & Mineral Resources, the State Concerns Turkmennebitgazgurlushyk (Turkmen oil and gas construction), Turkmengaz, Turkmennebit (Turkmen Oil), the State Corporation Turkmengeologiya (Turkmen Geology) and the Turkmenbashi complex of oil refineries, the president reshuffled high level oil sector officials and set a number of priority tasks before these energy sector agencies.

The audit of these state agencies was conducted on President Berdimuhamedov's orders. Following the findings, the President severely reprimanded the long-serving Deputy Chairman for Oil and Gas Baymyrad Hojamuhamedov for poor performance of his official duties and warned that if he fails to correct the flaws promptly, he will be relieved of his duties. The president also issued a reprimand to Tachberdi Tagiyev, General Director of the Turkmenbashi complex of oil refineries, for poor performance of his duties and shortcomings in his work. The deputy Chairman of the State Concern TurkmenOil, Hydyrberdi

Mammetnazarov was fired for what has been officially reported as serious shortcomings in his work. Berdimuhamedov also demoted the Chairman of the State Concern TurkmenOil, Rejepgeldi Ilamanov, to the position Head of the Oil and Gas Department within the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan. Since the government has not released any information to the public, it is unclear what might have caused such a big reshuffle and reprimands in the energy sector.

Going forward, the president laid out the key priority tasks for each state oil and gas sector agency and also emphasized Turkmenistan's commitments to completing its international pipeline projects. For instance, the Ministry of Oil and Gas and Mineral Resources of Turkmenistan was given specific instructions to develop strategic plans for the production of petroleum products and other manufactured goods that are in great demand in world markets. The president said that the Ministry should take all necessary measures for the development of the onshore fields and make long-term plans for the development of deposits in the Turkmen sector of the Caspian Sea. Certain foreign analysts claim that negotiations over the Southern Gas Corridor, which includes the Trans-Caspian project and remains a priority

for Brussels, might soon be reactivated especially given the renewed Ashgabat-Baku relations and President Berdimuhamedov's recent invitation to Ilham Aliev to pay an official visit to Turkmenistan.

The State Concern Turkmengas was tasked to fully complete by 2016 the 766 kilometer East-West gas pipeline that will have a capacity to carry 30bcm from the eastern to the western parts of the country. To meet international standards, it is necessary to build gas purification plants on the existing major gas deposits, said the president. Berdimuhamedov also noted that in 2014, Turkmengas needs to fully prepare all the documents associated with the project construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and undertake the necessary work to sign these documents and begin construction of the pipeline in 2015. The President also stressed the importance of continuing work on the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, completing the fourth line from Turkmenistan to China as scheduled until 2018, and moving forward with connections to Russia and Iran, as per earlier intergovernmental agreements.

To implement the framework agreements reached in September 2013 in Japan, the President instructed the Turkmengas chairman to sign the relevant contracts with Japanese companies before July 1, 2014, and begin construction of two plants for the production of gasoline from natural gas, each with a capacity of 600,000 tons per year. The signing of contracts will also

include the construction of a plant for the production of diesel and jet fuel from natural gas with a capacity of 2.6 million tons, and a plant for the production of synthetic crude oil from the associated gas. Turkmengaz was also tasked to ensure the timely construction of a major facility to produce 381 tons of polyethylene and 81,000 tons of polypropylene per year. In addition, the president said, it is necessary to develop an integrated project for the development of the Galkynysh gas field and to ensure the timely completion of the second phase jointly with China's CNPC for producing 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas by 2018.

The head of state also tasked the State Concern Turkmengaz to work effectively with scientists from the Institute of Oil and Gas under Turkmengaz and their colleagues from leading institutions in the region and other countries in the world. He noted that Turkmenistan's scientists and experts should also participate in the annual Oil and Gas of Turkmenistan (OGT) conference. Speaking to the chairman of the Turkmen oil and gas construction concern, President Berdimuhamedov ordered the development of capacity for producing fiber out of quartz sand and basalt and supplying the manufacturing enterprises with high quality pipes, the arrangement of export to foreign markets, and setting up production of coating materials for ongoing construction facilities from mining solid materials.

TAJIKISTAN SEIZES ASSETS AFTER FIRTASH'S ARREST

Oleg Salimov

Tajikistan's Anti-corruption agency has initiated legal proceedings against Ukrainian businessman Dmitry Firtash, the owner of Group DF. Firtash, recently arrested in Austria on bribery charges at the request of the FBI, maintains economic ties with Tajikistan through ownership of the clothing factory Guliston and the joint-stock company TajikAzot (TajikNitrogen), one of the largest producers of agricultural fertilizers in Central Asia. Allegedly possessing high political connections throughout Central Asia, Ukraine, and Russia, Firtash is in Tajikistan linked to the businessman Zaid Saidov, who was recently imprisoned in a case widely considered to be politically motivated.

Firtash was arrested in Vienna on March 12, 2014, and released on a 125 million Euro bail two days later. Firtash is accused of criminal collusion and bribery of state officials in India, allowing him access to titanium mining business. Following Firtash's arrest, Tajikistan's Anticorruption agency charged him on March 15 with the illegal privatization of the Guliston clothing factory in 2002. Firtash owned 95 percent of the stock, while Zaid Saidov owned the remaining 5 percent. In a swift decision, the Economic Court of Dushanbe granted the claim on April 2, in the absence of either the defendants or their representatives. The Economic Court transferred the factory

ownership to the Tajik Ministry of Industry and Innovations.

The second set of actions taken against Firtash was the revision of the joint-stock company TajikAzot, one fourth of which belongs to Tajikistan while Firtash owns the rest. The Anticorruption agency accuses Firtash of illegal privatization of the company in 2002 and misappropriation of funds. TajikAzot was modernized Under Firtash's ownership but experienced production difficulties from 2008 to 2011 due to energy shortages and high input expenses. In 2011, the Tajik parliament reduced the value-added tax for TajikAzot from 18 to 9 percent in an effort to reignite the production and increase the company's competitiveness. Currently, the company's economic profile looks bleak and can be revitalized only if Tajikistan resolves its energy problems.

The motivations behind the Tajik government's actions against Firtash can be economic as well as political. From an economic standpoint, the Tajik government is afraid that the U.S. will freeze Firtash's assets in Tajikistan as part of a far ranging investigation. In such a case, Tajikistan risks losing everything and thus decided to act first. Also, the Tajik government interpreted Firtash's arrest as an opportunity for financial gain. In 2012, Tajikistan's Anticorruption agency successfully claimed the Special

Engineering Bureau on Construction and Technology owned by Kazakh businessmen.

From a political standpoint, the Tajik government continues to persecute Saidov's supporters and business partners. Saidov's lawyer, Fakhridin Zokirov was arrested on charges of fraud on March 10, 2014, at the request of the Anticorruption agency, three months after Saidov was convicted to a 26-year prison sentence. Saidov's other lawyers have also complained about anonymous threats and warnings. Therefore, the expropriation of Firtash's assets serves as demonstration by the Tajik government of its persistence in dealing with political opposition.

The Anticorruption agency argued that Saidov was involved in the fraudulent privatization of Guliston and TajikAzot. Since Saidov's trial was classified by Tajikistan's Supreme Court, it is difficult to ascertain whether the companies were part of the accusations against Saidov. Saidov's verdict contains unspecified counts of bribery and fraud, which provide an opportunity for selective investigations of his activities and a-priori assumptions of their illegal character, as seen in Firtash's case.

The timing is another question in the Guliston and TajikAzot cases. Article 206 of Tajikistan's Civil Code defines a three-year limitation of action term on void contracts from the start of the contract. The privatization of Guliston and TajikAzot took place in 2002 – well beyond the three-year limitation term. Presumably, the Anticorruption agency

used Saidov's verdict to return property obtained as a result of illegal activity. Yet, there is little clarity, as required by legal norms, what property and activities are to be considered illegal. Saidov's case reveals serious deficiencies and ambiguities, which are in turn transferred into Firtash's case.

The number of legal ambiguities regarding the foundation of the accusations, the rapid decisions, and the timing of the accusations raise questions regarding the Tajik government's actions. Firtash's case undoubtedly provided an opportunity for the Tajik government. Not only did Firtash compromise his standing with the Tajik ruling elite through his connections with Zaid Saidov, but Firtash is also allegedly arrested for financial crimes at the FBI's request. Although Firtash's case has yet to be tried in court, it seems that the Tajik government saw his conviction as a done deal and have already decided the fate of his assets in Tajikistan. However, the Tajik government's actions send a strong repulsive message to businessmen and potential investors in the Tajik economy. The outcome of fast but poorly thought-out decisions can negatively affect the fragile Tajik economy.

GEORGIA'S INTERIOR MINISTRY WARNS OF PLANNED EUROMAIDAN

Eka Janashia

On April 7, Georgia's Minister of Internal Affairs Alexander Chikaidze warned the public that the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party plans to implement a EuroMaidan scenario in connection with the upcoming local elections by using criminal elements and Ukrainian EuroMaidan activists.

The minister claimed that EuroMaidan activists from Ukraine are already training Georgian counterparts in mobilizing rallies and setting up tents in the center of Tbilisi under the cover of non-governmental organizations. By destabilizing the situation, they will compel the authorities to use coercive measures and then showcase violations of citizens' rights in Georgia. According to Chikaidze, UNM is purchasing second-hand tires to stir violent protest with burning barricades while the Ministry of Internal Affairs is doing everything to prevent disorder and "the groups that are now trying to destabilize the situation will be strictly punished in accordance with the law."

While in Ukraine, the authorities' reversal of the country's European path caused popular unrest, there are no corresponding intentions in Georgia, Chikaidze said. Conversely, the minister stated that compared to previous years, the protection of human rights, privacy and freedom of opinion has been radically increased and there is a real perspective of signing an

Association Agreement with the EU in June, which will bring Georgia closer to Europe.

Commenting on the minister's statement, Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili said that Chikaidze just spoke about "those unattainable wishes that some abnormal people may have" and added that anyone who dares to carry out a destabilizing scenario "will be punished very severely."

Surprisingly, Chikaidze's announcement was not endorsed by some of the Georgian Dream (GD) leaders. Majority MP Tina Khidasheli criticized Chikaidze, saying that such statements demonstrates the weakness of the government; if the MIA expects a coup d'état in the country, it should act immediately rather than discuss the issue publicly.

UNM termed the minister's accusations "total nonsense" and a "very cheap attempt" to veil current political setbacks. UNM's secretary for foreign relations, Giga Bokeria, insisted that instead of paying attention to rising crime, security concerns related to Russia and economic stagnation, the government has invented an absurd story and seeks to sow panic.

UNM laments that the government deliberately seeks to destroy a pro-Western, democratic opposition party through policies of intimidation and repression. To illustrate these claims,

UNM quotes the case of MP Nugzar Tsiklauri. On March 30, Tsiklauri was allegedly assaulted by eight masked men with electroshock devices trying to drag him into a car. After the failed attempt, the attackers left the scene while the injured lawmaker was taken to a hospital.

Another complaint from UNM concerns the pre-election environment. UNM insists that the main opposition party is not awarded the possibility to conduct a proper election campaign and that its members have in several cities been prevented from meeting with locals and discussing projects suspended by the government.

On April 11, UNM MP Irma Nadirashvili provided details on the government's misconduct. According to her, the attack on UNM representatives in Anaklia was coordinated by Goga Nachkebia, head of the Special Operations Department (SOD) of Samegrelo region while in Kakheti; the UNM's planned events were interrupted by employees of the local self-government body. The head of the department for relations with local self-government bodies of the Imereti regional administration, Kote Lomidze, orchestrated parallel protest rallies in Tskaltubo to hinder UNM's campaign, whereas in Tbilisi and Batumi this responsibility was assumed by activists of the Democratic Movement-United Georgia party led by Nino Burjanadze.

While the pre-election environment grows tenser, some analysts point to emerging rifts within the ruling GD that could lead to a disintegration of the coalition. The disagreement between

President Giorgi Margvelashvili and former PM Bidzina Ivanishvili demonstrates a first sign of such a rift (see the [04/02/2014 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)). In addition Gubaz Sanikidze, a GD member and leader of the political party National Forum (NF), stated on March 18 that he did not exclude the possibility of leaving the coalition.

Khidasheli's recent statements also deserve attention in this regard. Firstly, her criticism of Chikaidze, the head of one of the key ministries, was unexpected. However, Khidasheli gave an even starker statement at a session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) on April 10, where she declared that it was not the president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, who provoked Russia to invade Georgia in 2008. "Whether you respond to Moscow's provocations or keep silent, the result will be the same," she said. This approach directly contradicts that of GD, which has since it came to power 2012 endeavored to launch a probe into the Georgian governments' faults during the August 2008 war (see the [04/17/2013 issue of the CACI Analyst](#)).

The appearing rifts within the coalition may be indicative of Ivanishvili's waning sway over Georgian politics. Although he left politics several months ago, his reputation has remained a primary source of legitimacy for the country's key political figures – Georgia's president and PM. Thus, Ivanishvili's declining political assets cast a diverse shadow, especially ahead of the local elections.

NATIONAL OPPOSITION RALLIES IN KYRGYZSTAN

Arslan Sabyrbekov

On April 10, Kyrgyzstan's recently created National Opposition Movement conducted its first rally in the capital Bishkek, as well as smaller supporting rallies in the cities of Jalalabad, Osh and Karakol. The number of participants in Bishkek ranged from 1,000 to 1,200 people, including a number of media representatives. In the provinces, the number varied from 200 to 500 demonstrators.

The demonstration took place in Bishkek's Gorky Park in a relatively peaceful manner, despite the detention of several dozens of demonstrators. According to the chief of Bishkek city Police, Melis Turganbaev, and Kyrgyzstan's Ombudsman Bakyt Amanbaev, more than 200 rally participants were detained because they gathered outside of the aforementioned park. They were released several hours later. Also, in an interview to local journalists, Kyrgyzstan's Ombudsman criticized state television channels for the biased coverage of the rally by portraying the demonstrators in a negative light. The Ombudsman stated that "all the citizens have inherent rights to peacefully hold rallies and demonstrations, where they can openly declare their opposition to any decisions taken by the country's authorities and their voices must be heard."

During the protests, prominent leaders of the National Opposition Movement delivered their speeches to their audience and put forward their demands to the country's political leadership. The demands ranged from renegotiating the agreement over the Canadian-run Kumtor Gold Mining Company, the president's resignation and the dissolution of the current Parliament, changing the sentence of the arrested former speaker of parliament Akhmatbek Keldibekov, and several other demands. The movement's leader, the independent MP Ravshan Jeenbekov, said that "the fundamental objective of the rally is to raise public awareness of the president's full control of the country and his continuing efforts to establish a fully authoritarian form of government in Kyrgyzstan." The opposition leader added that the rally was also conducted to call on the president and the country's top political leadership to stop selling the country's crucial assets to the Russian Federation. Kyrgyzstan's government recently reached a preliminary agreement with the Russian state oil company Rosneft to transfer its majority shares in Manas International Airport in exchange for assistance to create an international hub. This, according to the rally participants, heavily undermines the country's economic as well as political independence.

At exactly the same time as the united opposition was holding its first public rally, Kyrgyzstan's President Almazbek Atambayev met with Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller. The sides signed a final document according to which the world's largest extractor of natural gas will take over Kyrgyzstan's KyrgyzGaz natural-gas corporation for US\$ 1. During a press conference, Alexei Miller termed the deal "historic" and stated that "all debts of the Kyrgyz state company will become Gazprom's responsibility, the prices for gas for consumers in Kyrgyzstan will be decreased, and all projects and programs, including social ones, related to the company will be outlined and implemented with the Kyrgyz government's involvement."

The first rally of the recently created National Opposition Movement got a mixed reception from the Kyrgyz wider public and the local experts. According to Bishkek-based political analyst Shairbek Juraev, "in a democratic state, every political and social movement has a right to demonstrate, publicly deliver their ideas and there is nothing wrong with it, but there is a firm belief in our society that each demonstration shall lead to a revolution or a complete overthrow of the regime." Regarding the movement's demands, Juraev added that all of them are not groundless. Kyrgyzstan is indeed facing a number of socio-economic problems. The issue of the Kumtor Gold Mining Company and Manas International airport should be solved in the best interest of the country by holding public debates and discussions involving all the political forces. It remains a challenging task for

the current political leadership to seek that involvement with the opposition forces who demand the immediate resignation of the current political elite.

While the opposition leaders claim that the rally was conducted in a fairly peaceful and democratic manner, the country's recently nominated Prime Minister Joomart Otorbaev stated that the rally inflicted economic damages amounting to at least 100 million Kyrgyz soms. On the day of the rally, local entrepreneurs feared looting and closed their shops and businesses.