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## THE EFFECTS OF THE UKRAINE CRISIS ON TAJKISTAN

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## KEY POINTS

1. There are some tacit concerns over the unfolding Ukraine crisis in Tajikistan, although the foreign media may have exaggerated the effects.
2. The last presidential election, irrespective of foreign assessment demonstrated that Emomali Rahmon enjoys domestic support.
3. The concerns of the government over political opposition and parties are excessive and the measures it has taken might be counterintuitive.
4. The opposition is weak both politically and ideologically, so as organizationally and financially. Opposition politicians are most widely unknown among the population and hence opposition leaders cannot expect broad popular support in the near future.
5. No lesson has been drawn from the Khorog incident of 2012 and the 2014 Khorog incident is a reflection of this.
6. The government is looking for external adversaries rather than resolving domestic problems.

The second large scale crisis in post-Soviet Ukraine, after the 2004 'Orange Revolution', sparked in November 2013, when Ukraine suspended an association with the European Union (EU) and began to make closer ties with the Russian Federation instead.<sup>1</sup> This decision of President Viktor Yanukovich was followed by mass riots of pro-EU crowds in much of western Ukraine. About 100,000 people participated in the anti-governmental rallies, while the government used force against the demonstrators.<sup>2</sup> In February 2014, Yanukovich fled to Russia, while he was also

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1 Reuter. "Timeline: Ukraine crisis and Russia's stand-off with the West", <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/27/us-ukraine-crisis-events-timeline-idUSBREA3Q0CC20140427>> (June 30, 2014).

2 BBC. "Ukraine Crisis Timeline". <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>> (June 30, 2014).

officially removed from office by Ukraine's Parliament and an interim government was established by the opposition.<sup>3</sup> Russia called the Ukraine crisis a 'coup' organized with the support of Western countries, in particular the EU and the United States. Later on, after the Kremlin's military intervention in Crimea and a plebiscite not recognized by the West, an area populated predominantly by ethnic Russians, Crimea was annexed to the Russian Federation. The military intervention of Russia in other parts of eastern Ukraine further aggravated relations between the West and Russia.

This Ukrainian crisis alarmed post-communist Central Asian authoritarian leaders, three of whom are ruling for over decades. The Central Asian states demonstrated a very cautious and preventive approach to this conflict. The main concern of all leaders was to prevent the rise of a domestic counterpart of Ukrainian Maidan Square (aka 'Euromaidan', the site of major demonstrations in Ukraine's capital, Kiev), as well as put a halt to Moscow's intention to possibly 'protect' ethnic Russian minorities in Central Asia.<sup>4</sup> The concerns of the Central Asian leaders to some extent were relevant, but exaggerated by the foreign media.

This policy brief looks at security challenges posed by the Ukrainian crisis to one of the five Central Asian countries, Tajikistan, and discusses the preventive decisions taken by the Tajik government. The paper consists of the following parts: I. An overview of Central Asian states' approach to the Ukrainian crisis, II. A discussion of the campaign launched in Tajikistan to discredit the opposition, III. A look at the 2012 and 2014 events of Khorog, IV. Seeking external enemies, and V. Conclusions.

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3 Ibid.

4 Joanna, Lillis and David Trilling. "Russia-Ukraine Crisis Alarms Central Asian Strongmen". <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68104>> (June 15, 2014).

# I. REACTIONS OF THE FIVE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES TO THE UKRAINE CRISIS

Kazakhstan shares the longest ex-Soviet republic border with Russia and its population of ethnic Russians compose the largest percentage (24%) of any other Central Asian state.<sup>5</sup> The Kazakh president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, who since 1991 has demonstrated a highly tolerant approach toward ethnic minorities,<sup>6</sup> still found Russia's intervention in Ukraine to be disconcerting. Kazakhstan's Ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) called for a peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian problem, and subsequently, the Crimea referendum was called by Kazakhstan as a "free expression of the will of the Autonomous Republic's population".<sup>7</sup> With this, it seems that Kazakhstan was demonstrating its loyalty towards Russia, and on a broader perspective, Kazakhstan therefore did not criticize Russia's and certainly did not support the West's criticisms of Russia vis-a-vis Ukraine.

In contrast to Kazakhstan, in early March 2014, the MFA of the Kyrgyz Republic questioned the legitimacy of President Yanukovich, stating that after fleeing the country, he has already lost the trust of the Ukrainians.<sup>8</sup> In this way, Kyrgyzstan—which, itself having had gone through two regime changes or 'revolutions' in 2005 and 2010—officially recognized the legitimacy of the transitional government of

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5 World Population Review. "Kazakhstan Population 2014," <<http://world-populationreview.com/countries/kazakhstan-population/>> (July 10, 2014).

6 Lillis Joanna. "Kazakhstan: Russians Blend Loyalty to Nazarbayev with Pro-Kremlin Senti". <<http://eurasianet.org/node/68270>> (June 30, 2014).

7 Jamestown Foundation. "Kazakhstan Responds to Ukraine Crisis", 24 March 2014, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11 (55), <<http://www.refworld.org/docid/5332b98b4.html>> (June 30,2014).

8 Sabyrbekov, Arslan. "Bishkek's First Official Statement on Ukraine". <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12941-bishkeks-first-official-statement-on-ukraine.html>> (June 30, 2014).

Ukraine.<sup>9</sup> However, afterwards, Kyrgyzstan appears to have changed its seemingly pro-Western stance, and agreed to enter the Custom Union, to please Russia, a move which increased the concerns of the U.S.<sup>10</sup>

Turkmenistan, with its usual 'neutral' approach to world politics has not taken any stand on the Ukrainian crisis and has also continued to deprive its population, as much as it can, from accessing foreign media.<sup>11</sup> Home to a 4% Russian minority,<sup>12</sup> Turkmenistan abstained from voting at the UN General Assembly meeting on Ukraine's territorial integrity in March 2014.<sup>13</sup>

Uzbekistan's MFA released a statement concerning Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> In June 2014, President Islam Karimov also criticized the treaty by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus to establish the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Considering Russia's leadership in the EEU, President Karimov believes that other member states of the EEU will be politically dependent on Russia.<sup>15</sup> It seems that Uzbekistan, which agreed to provide the platform for the U.S. troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan through the use

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- 9 KNEWS. "Kyrgyzstan priznal zakonnoy smenu vlasti v Ukraine?" <[http://www.knews.kg/politics/46535\\_kyrgyzstan\\_priznal\\_zakonnoy\\_smenu\\_vlasti\\_v\\_ukraine/](http://www.knews.kg/politics/46535_kyrgyzstan_priznal_zakonnoy_smenu_vlasti_v_ukraine/)> (May 2014).
  - 10 Asia Plus. "США обеспокоились сближением Киргизии с Россией". <<http://news.tj/ru/node/197663>> (November 2014).
  - 11 Aisha Berdyeva, "Turkmenistan: Trying to Keep a Lid on News from Ukraine", EurasiaNet, <<http://eurasianet.org/node/68320>> (June 30, 2014).
  - 12 World Population Review. "Turkmenistan Population 2014" <<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/turkmenistan-population/>> (July 10, 2014).
  - 13 RFE/RL. "UN Passes Resolution Calling Crimean Referendum Invalid," <<http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-un-passes-crimea-resolution/25312158.html>> (July 12, 2014).
  - 14 M. K. Bhradrakumar. "Ukraine Matters in Central Asia," Indian Punchline, April 13, 2014, <<http://blogs.rediff.com/mkbhadrakumar/2014/04/13/ukraine-matters-in-central-asia/>> (November 16, 2014).
  - 15 RFE/RL. "Ислам Каримов против Евразес [Islam Karimov is Against Eurasia]" <<http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25415754.html>> (November 16, 2014).

of its territory, wants to maintain good relations with the West, though the country's overall foreign policy appears increasingly ambivalent.

What is Tajikistan's stance on the Ukraine crisis? Tajikistan has one of the lowest percentages of ethnic Russians amongst the post-Soviet states. It has also developed its own unique position vis-a-vis the Ukraine issue. The coverage of the Ukraine crisis in Tajikistan has been restrained: neither high level officials, nor the MFA have spoken publicly about Ukraine or clarified the country's position.<sup>16</sup> The state run media appears to have all together stopped reporting about the protests, riots and the now civil war of Ukraine.<sup>17</sup> The first official statement of Tajikistan echoed in early May 2014 during an unofficial meeting of the country's president, Emomali Rahmon, with his counterparts from Russia, Armenia, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan, which took place in Moscow. Then, Rahmon said:

"We are familiar with such developments. Tajikistan in its initial steps of independence, in the early-1990s faced [similar] internal political confrontations followed by an armed conflict, which lead the country to a socio-economic and humanitarian crisis. In our opinion, we should comprehend and assess the situation in Ukraine impartially and prevent an armed conflict. We support a peaceful settlement of the crisis through dialogue and negotiations."<sup>18</sup>

This official statement of the Tajik president was somewhat vague, in that it was unclear whether the country supports the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine, and to what extent the Tajik government desires to maintain good relations with

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16 Ozodagon. "Ozodagon ne udalos uznat mnenie MID o referendumе v Krimu [Ozodagon could not get the position of MFA on referendum in Crimea]," <<http://catoday.org/centrasia/tjru/13518-ozodagon-ne-udalos-uznat-mnenie-mid-tadzhikistana-o-referendume-vkrymu.html>> (May 30, 2014).

17 Asia Plus. "Krimskie Uroki [Crimean Lessons]," <<http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/krymskie-uroki>> (March 14, 2014).

18 President Rossii. "Vstrecha s prezidentami Armenii, Belorussii, Kirgizii, i Tadzhikistana [Meeting with the Presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan]," May 8, 2014, <<http://www.kremlin.ru/news/20980>> (June 30, 2014).

the West by not positioning itself in favour of Russia. Despite the government's efforts to halt reporting on the crisis, hot debates have been reflected in social media and the Ukrainian events have often been compared with the beginning of the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, Suhrob Sharipov, one of the government's ideologues and a member of Parliament from the pro-governmental People's Democratic Party (PDP), appeared in the media with an anti-Russian statement and called Russia's policies towards Tajikistan "stupid and double-faced"—likely referring to Russia's warming of relations with Tajikistan's nemesis, Uzbekistan, and Russia's continued use of Tajikistan's (over one million) economic migrants in its territory as a bargaining chip to gain political and economic advantages. Sharipov also suggested conducting a referendum and removing the local administrative units, provinces [oblasts], and maintaining only districts and centres. This suggestion was a direct reaction to both the 2012 demonstrations in Khorog, the capital of the Badakhshan Autonomous Mountainous Province (Badakhshan, for short)<sup>20</sup> and likely also the events in Ukraine. Sharipov's statement compelled some experts to claim that the government of Tajikistan is concerned about the rise of separatist sentiments in Badakhshan. The leader of Tajikistan's main opposition party—the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP)—Muhiddin Kabiri, believes that inevitably an analogy with the Ukrainian events will emerge in the Central Asian states.<sup>21</sup> He maintained his idea by comparing similar conditions in developing countries:

"Why do revolutions happen in the developing or Third World countries?"

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- 19 Barno Qodirdukt, "Shabohathoi Ukrainai 2014 bo Tojikistoni 1992 [Similarities of 2014 Ukraine with 1992 Tajikistan]," RFE/RL, February 23, 2014, <<http://www.ozodi.org/content/tajik-analysts-compareukrainian-events-with-tjik-in-1992/25274293.html>> (March 14, 2014).
- 20 Ozodagon. "Suhrob Sharipov: Boyad hamapursi shuda, sokhtori davlatdori digar gardad" <<http://www.ozodagon.com/15182-srob-sharifov-boyad-referendum-shavad-va-sohtori-davlatdorivaz-gardad.html>> (March 14, 2014).
- 21 Asia Plus. "Kabiri: To, chto proiskhodit v Ukraine, zhdet Centralnuyu Aziyu". <<http://www.news.tj/ru/node/184712>> (July 10, 2014).



The Third World faces the same problems: underdevelopment, social injustice, rising corruption ... The events in states with dictatorial regimes [meant Ukraine] should serve as an example for other autocrats, who should change their way of governance".<sup>22</sup>

## II. DISCREDITING THE OPPOSITION

Government concerns vis-a-vis the ongoing Ukraine crisis appear to be rising in Tajikistan. Some outspoken politicians, for example, such as Rahmatillo Zoirov, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), had even visited the Maidan Square in Kiev and wanted to hold a press conference on the events when back in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital. He was, however, interrupted by a small angry mob, that according to Zoirov was organized and sent by the government. Zoirov was blamed by the said mob and some government commentators for inciting people to violence and attempting a repetition of the events that led to the (1992-97) Tajik civil war.<sup>23</sup> The same allegation was made towards the IRP, which is under defamation by the state-run media for the same reason.<sup>24</sup> In 2014 three field offices of the IRP were shut down in the regions, while high officials of the IRP, including its leader, Kabiri,<sup>25</sup> faced verbal and even physical attacks.<sup>26</sup> Several films with the alleged participation of IRP

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22 Dialog. "Muhiddin Kabiri o migratsii, TALKO, Ukraine i Rossii". <<http://www.dialog.tj/news/news17205>> (July 10, 2014).

23 RFE/RL Tajik Service. "Ataka na vecherinku v office partii Zoirova". <<http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25282254.html>> (March 14, 2014).

24 The IRP was blamed for provocation of civil war several times by the state media.

25 Ozodagon. "Habsi hamlavar va himoyatgari Muhiddin Kabiri dar Kulob". <<http://www.ozodagon.com/16686-absi-amlavar-va-imoyatgari-muiddin-kabir-dar-klob.html>>

26 The speaker of the IRP-Saifullozoda was beaten up by unknown people, while in recent years the deputy head of the IRP Mahmatali Hait was brutally beaten up, while unknown people attacked Saidumar Husaini - the first deputy head of IRP - on the way to Khorog, the similar incident happened with the outspoken representative of the IRP Vaisiddin Qosiddin.

members who fought in the Syrian war were shown on state TV channels.<sup>27</sup> A number of videos purportedly showing sexual misconduct by IRP members were also disseminated in social media during the year.

What amounts to an orchestrated state media defamation of the opposition and limiting the activities of the two key opposition parties in Tajikistan demonstrates that the IRP and SDP are challenging the government. At the same time, the real threats to the stability of the regime by the opposition have likely been grossly overestimated. The best example is the last dissemination via social media in early October 2014 on the planned holding of anti-governmental protests by the banned opposition-in-exile “Group 24”.<sup>28</sup> Group 24 had announced that on 10 October a protest rally was to take place in the main square of Dushanbe and called on the population to participate in it.<sup>29</sup> This was taken seriously by the authorities and various security counter-measures were taken. The IRP and SDP were the first parties that condemned the call from Group 24 and invited their followers to be careful and abstain from participating in the protest, if there were to be any.<sup>30</sup> The parties wanted to demonstrate that they do not support potentially violent protests and prefer peace and stability, instead. There are thus several reasons why the Tajik authorities should not be concerned by formal opposition parties; on the contrary, compromise with the said parties would add some extra points to the reputation

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27 Nahzat.tj. “Provokatsiya ili opaseniya ot politicheskogo konkurenta”. <[http://www.nahzat.tj/russian/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=858:provocation&Itemid=429](http://www.nahzat.tj/russian/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=858:provocation&Itemid=429)> (July 12, 2014)

28 Group 24 is opposition group established by Umarali Kuvvatov, former businessman escaped from Tajikistan. According to sources his companies were taken by the close relatives of the Tajik president.

29 On November 12, 2014 the Parliament of Tajikistan passed a new law on demonstrations and street protests, which forbids from forcing people to take part in protests and street demonstrations. <<http://news.tj/en/news/parliament-passes-law-demonstrations-and-street-processions>> (November 13, 2014).

30 Asia Plus. “Lozhnaya Trevoga?” [False Alarm?] <<http://news.tj/ru/news/lozhnaya-trevoga>> (November 2014).

of the government in front of the population and also the international donors (primarily the U.S. and EU countries) that supposedly support the democratization process in Tajikistan.

The last presidential election held in November 2013 ended with a re-election of the incumbent, Emomali Rahmon, for a fourth term with a large majority of the votes (84%).<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, the crackdown on the opposition e.g. Zaid Saidov of the unregistered New Tajikistan Party<sup>32</sup> in the pre-election period demonstrated that the ruling regime would take all measures to remain in power and scare any staunch challengers in the future. On the other hand, the 2013 election was also a sign that the incumbent president in reality does not have a worthy counterweight. There was no doubt on Rahmon's success at the election. As told by Kirill Nourzhanov, in Tajikistan Rahmon is still considered as a "peacemaker" and an experienced leader "who ensures stability and prosperity",<sup>33</sup> while Antoine Buisson attributes Rahmon's popularity to "political charisma".<sup>34</sup>

Tajikistan's political parties are still too weak and unpopular among the population to resist the ruling party. The country has eight political parties that can be divided into two groups: real and "pseudo" parties—the latter established by the government to demonstrate the semblance of political

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31 OSCE/ODIHR. "Republic of Tajikistan Presidential Election 2013". EOM Final Report. <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/110986?download=true>> (July 15, 2014).

32 Zaid Saidov, ex-minister of industry and successful Tajik businessman announced about the establishment of a new political party. Later he was arrested charged of corruption, polygamy and received 26 years imprisonment.

33 Kirill Nourzhanov. "Presidential Elections in Tajikistan: Emomali Rahmon's Fourth Term at the Helm". <[http://www.e-ir.info/2013/12/23/presidential-elections-in-tajikistan-emomali-rahmons-fourth-term-at-the-helm/?utm\\_source=twitterfeed&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.e-ir.info/2013/12/23/presidential-elections-in-tajikistan-emomali-rahmons-fourth-term-at-the-helm/?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter)> (June 15, 2014).

34 Antoine Buisson. "State-Building, Power-Building and Political Legitimacy: The Case of Post-Conflict Tajikistan". *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Volume 5, No. 4 (2007) p. 142.

pluralism.<sup>35</sup> In reality, only four out of eight parties: the PDP, the IRP, the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party are the real political parties in Tajikistan.<sup>36</sup> An International Foundation for Electoral System (IFES) public opinion poll (N=1,500) showed that 87% of the respondents were aware of the PDP, while the IRP was known to 69% of the same interviewees, and only 24% had knowledge of the SDP.<sup>37</sup>

In the 2013 presidential election, the SDP and the IRP, together with some independent intellectuals, established the United Reformist Force (URF) with the objective of a “democratic and transparent election”. This step was perceived as a positive sign by observers, but criticized by state media.<sup>38</sup> The disagreement of the two parties forming the URF on the nomination of a single candidate to stand for presidential election, further questioned this alliance. Kabiri, who is a charismatic leader not only among members of the IRP, but also among many secular Tajikistanis, is thought by some observers as a counterweight to Rahmon.<sup>39</sup> But he refrained from running in the election, while his counterpart, Zoirov, the leader of the SDP, was more than eager to run and hoped to receive the support of the IRP. However, the IRP offered the nomination of Oynihol Bobonazarova, a 63 year old human rights lawyer and head of a non-governmental organization (NGO), instead, a decision, which soon Zoirov

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35 Mukhtorova, Uguloy. “Helsinki’s counterintuitive effect? OSCE/ODIHR’s election observation missions & solidification of virtual democracy in post-communist Central Asia: the case of Tajikistan, 2000-2010.” MA thesis, OSCE Academy, 2013. in Bishkek. <<http://osce-academy.net/en/research/Besttheses/>>

36 Ibid.

37 IFES.2010. “Public Opinion in Tajikistan/Findings from an IFES Survey.” <<http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/Survey/2010/Public-Opinion-in-Tajikistan-2010.aspx>> (May 30, 2013).

38 Tillaev Y. “Rahmon: vibori-svobodno i kulturno!” <<http://narodnaya.tj/politika/434-2013-10-09-10-00-47>> (July 10, 2014).

39 Payam Foroughi. 2012. “Tajikistan.” In *Nations in Transit 2012: Fragile Frontier – Democracy’s Growing Vulnerability in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. Christopher Walker and Sylvana Habdank-Kolaczowska, Freedom House, eds. New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 531-50.

endorsed. This initial disagreement, however, caused misunderstandings between two key opposition parties.<sup>40</sup> Given the largely politically-motivated administrative barriers imposed by the authorities, the fear of people in supporting the opposition, and also the reality of the low numbers of followers of the IRP and SDP,<sup>41</sup> the URF failed to collect the requested 210,000 signatures in support of Bobonazarova's candidacy, and she was thus disqualified by the Central Commission for Election and Referenda to stand as a candidate in the 2013 presidential election.<sup>42</sup>

### III. THE KHOROG EVENTS

On May 21, 2014, a skirmish between the police and suspected criminals took place in the central street of Khorog, the capital of Badakhshan. The resulting gunfire led to two deaths and six people were injured.<sup>43</sup> This incidence triggered the local population, already disenchanted with the country's security structures due to the 2012 invasion of Khorog and tens of ensuing casualties, to stage anti-governmental demonstrations, which among other things led to the burning of government structures, "including a police station, the prosecutor's office and a court building".<sup>44</sup> The incident was interpreted as having been influenced by

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40 Supra.

41 Opposition leaders do not have many followers and are not well-known among population due to several obstacles. For instance, according to the IRP itself the party has 50,000 members. Along with the IRP, the SDP which is considered an oppositional party has 7,000 members, while the leading party of the president PDP has 210,000 members.

42 The failure was explained due to obstacles created by local authorities during the collection of signature.

43 BBC. "Na vostoke Tadjhikistana rezko nakalilas obstanovka," <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/rolling\\_news/2014/05/140521\\_rn\\_tajikistan\\_shooting.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/rolling_news/2014/05/140521_rn_tajikistan_shooting.shtml)> (July 10, 2014).

44 David Trilling. "In Tajikistan's East, New Casualties Portend Tit-for-Tat Violence," EurasiaNet, 26 May 2014, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68406>> (November 16, 2014).

the Ukraine effect by some foreign media. According to the local experts and people,<sup>45</sup> however, the unprofessional approach of the police was the main reason for the anger of the population, that demanded punishment of the police. Unknown assailants also attacked the local department of the State Committee for National Security (GKNB, aka 'KGB').<sup>46</sup> On the said events in Badakhshan, the Tajik Communist Party head and MP, Shodi Shabdolov (himself a native of Badakhshan), stated that "Tajikistan might lose Badakhshan" if state policy will not be altered towards this region as soon as possible.<sup>47</sup>

The May event in Badakhshan was the second incidence in Khorog in the last two years. In late July 2012, the murder of the GKNB provincial head, General Abdullo Nazarov, resulted in a military operation by Dushanbe involving as many as 3,000 troops and security agents.<sup>48</sup> Despite the official justification on the issue, which was to arrest the murderer of Nazarov, the main motivation behind the operation according to analyst Shahrabonou Tadjbakhsh was to take control over the trade and profits coming from illicit trade and crackdown on the unofficial Badakhshani leaders, who had remained from the civil war era and who are suspected of being involved in illicit trade and activities.<sup>49</sup> According to official sources, 45 people from both ordinary locals and the invading military were killed during the said

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- 45 Out of 1,150 respondents of a survey by the largest independent newspaper in Tajikistan, Asia Plus, more than half thought that the Khorog events are the result of unprofessional operation of police. <<http://news.tj/ru/poll/all?page=1>> (July 2014).
- 46 Avesta.tj. "GKNB prokomentirovalo nochnoe napadenie nad zdanie svoego upravleniya v Khoroge" <<http://www.avesta.tj/security/25266-gknb-prokomentirovalo-nochnoe-napadenie-na-zdanie-svoego-upravleniya-v-horoge.html>> (July 12, 2014).
- 47 Avaz Yuldoshev. "Shabdolov: Tajikistan mozhet poteryat GBAO" <<http://news.tj/ru/node/188908>> (July 12, 2014).
- 48 Faredun Khodzoda, "Operatsiya v Khoroge i Boyevoe Sostoyaniye Vooruzhennykh Sil Tadjhikistana," *Analiticheskiye Zametki o Politike i Bezopasnosti v Tsentral'noy Azii*, no. 10 (2012), 4.
- 49 Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh. "Turf on the roof of the world". NOREF Report, 2012.

incidence.<sup>50</sup> Such measures by the authorities drastically undermined the reputation of the central government in front of the Badakhshan population (aka 'Pamiris') and led to an increase of sentiments of real autonomy, if not separatism, among them.<sup>51</sup>

It should be highlighted that the eastern province of Badakhshan is the most remote and underdeveloped area in Tajikistan, sharing the country's borders with Afghanistan and China. Due to its geographical location and poor infrastructure, Badakhshan is characterized by high rate of unemployment. The province is home for the Pamiri people, who speak different languages other than Tajiks and whose religion is Shia Ismaili, as opposed to Hanafi Sunni, which the majority of Tajikistan's population adhere to.

## IV. SEEKING AN EXTERNAL DEVIL

The 2014 Khorog incident was linked to geopolitical games in the region with the involvement of a "third hand," so claimed a statement by an MP and former head of Tajikistan's National Security Council, Amirqul Azimov, who had attempted to ironically link the commencement of the Khorog conflict to a visit of a diplomat from the EU to Badakhshan.<sup>52</sup> Azimov had stated:

"We should tell people not to believe in the idea called democracy... There are countries which at times are not interested in stability of Tajikistan... Look, the representatives of the EU delegation met a former field commander, Mahmadoqir Mahmadoqirov, in Badakhshan. What does it mean? Do such meetings not aim at destabilizing Badakhshan? We know that some people want to separate us from each other [i.e. desire to

50 Civic Solidarity Platform. "Monitoring of observance of human rights in connection with the special operation Conducted on 24 July 2012 in Khorog" 2013.

51 Avaz Yuldoshev. "Shabdolov: Tajikistan mozhet poteryat GBAO".

52 The visit of the representative of the EU to Khorog occurred on 10-14 of May.

instigate separatism in Badakhshan]... Now these international organizations are playing games."<sup>53</sup>

Despite the fact that the visit was explained as a "coincidence" by the EU diplomat,<sup>54</sup> this statement was an open accusation of the involvement of foreign organizations in the Khorog conflict, and the start of an apparent anti-Western campaign by the government, which continued in statements of high-level officials who blamed international organizations active in Tajikistan for undermining the stability of the country. After this incidence, Sherali Khairulloev, the assistant to the president on defence issues, claimed that he knows the "scriptwriters" of the Khorog conflict and he had spoken with them, and that "the people who want to resolve the Khorog problems from the outside are not even citizens of Tajikistan..."<sup>55</sup> He did not indicate an exact name of those "scriptwriters," which left room for misinterpretation. In turn, in June 2014, a group composed of 45-50 angry people demonstrated in front of the United Kingdom's Embassy in Dushanbe, throwing stones on the embassy building and blaming the UK for undermining the stability of the country.<sup>56</sup> The Embassy incidence, in turn, also occurred at a time when the UK Ambassador to Tajikistan, Robert Ord-Smith, was on a field trip to Khorog. On the same day, Kabiri, the leader of the IRP, was attacked by tomatoes and eggs during his meeting with people in the southern town of Kulob.<sup>57</sup>

53 RFE/RL.Azimov: Mardum fireftai goyahoii ba nom demokratiya nashaved! <<http://www.ozodi.org/content/excl-iv-with-amirqul-azimov/25393058.html>> (June 10, 2014).

54 RFE/RL. "Nitray: Net nikakoy svyazi mezhdu nashim visitom v Khorog i vcherashnimi sobitiyami". <<http://rus.ozodi.org/content/article/25394151.html>> (July 10, 2014).

55 Asia Plus. "Khairulloev znaet, kto senaristi i dirizheri sobitii v Khoroge" <<http://asiaplus.tj/ru/news/sh-khairulloev-znaet-kto-stsenaristy-i-dirizheri-sobytii-v-khoroge-21-maya>> (June 10, 2014).

56 Asia Plus. "Piketchiki prosyat privilech k otvetstvennosti sotrudnikov posolstva Velikobritanii". <<http://news.tj/ru/news/piketchiki-prosyat-privlech-k-otvetstvennosti-sotrudnikov-posolstvavelikobritanii>> (July 10, 2014).

57 Ozodagon. "Habsi hamlavar va himoyatgari Muhiddin Kabiri dar Kulob". <<http://www.ozodagon.com/16686-absi-amlavar-va-imoyatgari-muiddin-kabir-dar-klob.html>> (June 30, 2014).



Organizing even a peaceful piquet is very difficult in Tajikistan, because to conduct any major gathering and demonstration, a special permission is needed from the authorities. The government has never given permission to any demonstrators—not that there have been many requests to begin with. In 2013, a similar demonstration had occurred in front of the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe. Shokirjon Khakimov, the deputy head of the SDP, believes that the “patrons” of these demonstrations and attacks are the same, and he questions as to “why such incidents do not happen to the leading party or officials, but occur only with the opposition”.<sup>58</sup>

The arrest of Alexander Sodiqov, a Tajik researcher in Khorog, a PhD candidate in Toronto University, who was working in the framework of an Exeter University project in June 2014 was depicted by the authorities as the continuation of “anti-Western” campaign, as told by Edward Lemon.<sup>59</sup> Sodiqov was arrested by the GKNB on June 16, 2014 while he was interviewing a provincial representative of the SDP, Alim Sherzamonov, an outspoken activist. The GKNB alleged charges of espionage for a foreign state against Sodiqov. Sodiqov’s arrest and detention, however, led to a massive campaign by academics and human rights organizations outside of Tajikistan, rallying for his release. In its call to the Tajik authorities, Reporters without Borders demanded the release of Sodiqov, stating that instead of taking responsibility for instability of the country, Tajikistan is blaming foreigners for its misfortune.<sup>60</sup>

The head of GKNB, Saimumin Yatimov, in front of a gathering of international organizations (IOs) attending

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58 Asia Plus. “Meetingi pod prikritiem”. <<http://news.tj/ru/node/190112>> (June 30, 2014).

59 Edward Lemon. “Tajikistan: Researcher’s Arrest Connected to Anti-Western Mood” <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68926>> (July 10, 2014).

60 Asia Plus. “Alexander Sodiqov’s arrest is the result of the Tajik government’s paranoia, says RWB official” <<http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/rwb-arest-sodikova-rezultat-paranoi-tadzhikskogo-pravitelstva>> (June 30, 2014).

the conference “Countering the Modern Threats in Central Asia: Achievements and Perspectives of Tajikistan Against Terrorism, Extremism and Corruption,” organised by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) accused IOs of being an external hand and mastering conflicts and problems in Tajikistan. He stated: “Some NGOs working under the auspices of international organizations threaten our security.”<sup>61</sup>

“To blame an undefined third party for problems and conflicts inside [the country],” however, “is easier rather than to take responsibilities for problems and conflicts provoked by misguided state policy”.<sup>62</sup> According to a Tajik analyst, Parviz Mullojonov, during the Ukraine Crisis, the “West like never before is interested in the stability and strengthening of the independence of post-Soviet states.” Stable and strong Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries reduce the chances of Russia to implement its “imperial ambitions” in the post-Soviet arena, believes Mullojonov. Secondly, in the period of the U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) withdrawal from Afghanistan, foreign countries, including Great Britain, are unlikely to be interested in instability in Tajikistan.<sup>63</sup> Practice shows that Western IOs dealing with human rights, democratization and security downplay the liberal norms and democratic values by giving priority to security and border management in Tajikistan.<sup>64</sup> Thirdly, Tajikistan is one of the most aid-dependent countries in the region. Tajikistan, for example, received over half (58%) of all aid allocation to Central Asia by the European Commission Humanitarian

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61 Asia Plus. “Yatimov pristidil zarubezhnie organizatsii za finansirovanie destabilizatsii v Tadjikistane” <<http://news.tj/ru/news/yatimov-pristidil-zarubezhnye-organizatsii-za-finansirovanie-destabilizatsii-vtadjikistane>> (June 30, 2014).

62 Interview with Bishkek based researcher. June 20, 2014.

63 Parviz Mullojonov. “Tomato Task Force” and Exporting ‘Colour Revolutions’,” <<http://news.tj/ru/node/190306>> (June 30, 2014).

64 Mukhtorova, “Helsinki’s counterintuitive effect?...” 2013 <<http://osce-academy.net/en/research/Besttheses/>>

Office in the period of 2003-2011.<sup>65</sup> Part of European and much of American aid to Tajikistan have increasingly been in the security sector. As Filippo De Danieli posits, “security assistance is one of the major fields of commitment for foreign donors in Tajikistan”.<sup>66</sup>

IOs and Western countries are contributing to strengthening of law enforcement bodies and security agencies of the country for more than decade. Why should they now try to destabilize the country, which would deny their previous efforts? Mullojonov argues:

“...if Westerners were really interested in undermining our stability, then they would not need to try hard. It would not be necessary to arrange any ‘colour revolutions’ or riots. It would be enough to simply cut our access to financial resources, Western loans and grants.”<sup>67</sup>

The head of the analytical Centre Boztob, journalist Rajabi Mirzo, explains the policies of the government differently. He believes that after ratification of an agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan via the territory of Tajikistan and other neighboring Central Asian republics, the authorities fabricated the case of Alexander Sodiqov to show to Russia that Tajikistan opposes the West.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, as Edward Lemon argues, a “political upheaval in Ukraine has boosted the Tajiks’ paranoia”.<sup>69</sup>

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65 Bruno De Cordier. 2013. “The EU’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Policy in Central Asia: Past and Emergencies to Come.” EUCAM Policy Brief 29.

66 Filippo De Danieli. “Counter-narcotics policies in Tajikistan and their impact on statebuilding.” *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (2011).

67 Mullojonov. “Tomato Task Force” and Exporting “Colour Revolutions”.

68 Asia Plus. “Rajabi Mirzo:Tadzhikistan khochet pokazat Rossii, chto imeet problem s zapadom” <<http://news.tj/ru/news/rmirzo-tadzhikistan-khochet-pokazat-rossii-chto-imeet-problemy-s-zapadom>> (July 10, 2014).

69 Edward Lemon. “Tajikistan: Researcher’s Arrest Connected to Anti-Western Mood”.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The 2013-2014 crisis which occurred in Ukraine might have an impact on countries with a similar Soviet history and internal socio-economic problems. The tacit concern of Tajikistan over the upheavals in Ukraine in 2014 has been combined with undertaking preventive measures utilizing the country's security agencies and apparatus. It is high time, however, for the authorities to identify the real threats, which are threatening the security of the country, rather than to give in to self-fulfilling prophecies.

The rising pressure on opposition political parties, for example, might provoke some among the opposition supporters to take serious steps against the government. In recent years, the IRP has already faced pressures by the government, but its leader, Kabiri, has preferred to tolerate such pressures in silence<sup>70</sup> perhaps so as not to lose the party's two seats in Parliament or not to provoke an even more serious confrontation with the authorities. The Peace Accord signed in 1997 to end the five year civil war by the opposition and the current regime seems to have been increasingly forgotten by now. On June 27, which is the Day of National Unity, Kabiri spoke up, claiming: "If the government cannot manage the situation in the country, the IRP is ready to fix it".<sup>71</sup> This may be an example of how preventive policies lead to the reverse. Instead of restrictions and confrontation, it may be more productive for the government to leave space for the opposition.

While looking at the Khorog upheavals in 2012 and 2014, one could see the results of policies chosen by the

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70 Ashurov, Abdullo. "HNIT-ro ba provokatsiya tela dodaniand." *Radioi Ozodi* <<http://www.ozodi.org/content/activist-of-islamic-revival-party-10000-dollars-for-informators-pressconference/24962928.html>> (August 14, 2013).

71 Abdulloeva Mavzuna. "Kabiri: Esli vlast ne spravlyaetsa s situatsiey v strane, to PIVT gotova ispravit eto". <<http://news.tj/ru/node/190587>> (June 30, 2014).

authorities. In 2012 the Tajik authorities used force in Badakhshan which provoked ordinary people into protest, while in 2014, the conflict started because of what appears to have been unprofessional and overly aggressive behaviour of the police. The Khorog events of 2014 demonstrated that the lessons from 2012 were not learnt. Therefore, politicians like Shabdolov suggested reconsidering the economic and social policies in the region, before it would be too late.<sup>72</sup>

It might also be better for the government to continue to balance relations with both the West and Russia, rather than blame the West (or Russia) for causing instability in Tajikistan. As Mullojonov argues, Dushanbe should neither hurt Russia nor destroy relations with the West.<sup>73</sup> Firstly, Russia is one of the main strategic partners of Tajikistan, which until 2042 will host 7,000 Russian troops in the country based on agreement signed between Moscow and Dushanbe in 2012 and ratified by the Parliament in 2013.<sup>74</sup> Secondly, Tajikistan is the most remittance-dependent country in the world. In 2013 remittances coming from Tajik migrants living in the Russian Federation were estimated at nearly US\$4 billion, which is equivalent to 52% of Tajikistan's gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>75</sup> Stable relations with Russia thus guarantee a stable job market for Tajik migrants. On the other hand, when it comes to relations with the West, it should not be forgotten that 2014 is the year of the ISAF and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Parliament of Tajikistan has also ratified an agreement which allows NATO troops to

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72 Avaz Yuldoshev. "Shabdolov: Tajikistan mozhet poteryat GBAO".

73 RFE/RL. "Mavqei Tojikiston ba toktutozhoi Putin dar Ukraine chi guna oshad?" <<http://www.ozodi.org/content/position-tajikistan-for-ukraine-/25294329.html>> (June 30, 2014).

74 BBC. "Tadzhikistan ratifitsiroval dogovor o rossiyskoi base" <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2013/10/131001\\_tajik\\_russia\\_base.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2013/10/131001_tajik_russia_base.shtml)> (June 30, 2014).

75 The World Bank (2014). Annual Remittances Data (as of April 2014). <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTDECPROSPECTS/0,,contentMDK:22759429~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:476883,00.html#Remittances> (June 2014).

use Tajikistan's land and airspace.<sup>76</sup> Balanced relations with both the West and Russia promise further access to large funds and support from both sides. Prudent management of the internal opposition and wise foreign policy by the Tajik authorities can thus lead to a more secure and stable Tajikistan. And what happens in Ukraine may well stay in Ukraine.

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76 Shahlo Gulkhoja. "NATO ba khoku havoii Tojikiston roh yoft". <<http://www.ozodi.org/content/tjk-parlt-approved-agreement-with-nato/25434948.html>> (June 30, 2014).

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