





Uzbekistan

Figure 7. Regional differences



-  - The Ferghana Valley has a high concentration of Muslim population and contains a third of Uzbekistan's 90 per cent Muslims. There have also been occurrences of nationalist activities in the region, especially in the Andijon and Namangan regions.
-  - Sunni Islam dominates in the large part of Uzbekistan.
-  - Samarkand and Bukhara have a large concentration of ethnic Tadjiks demanding cultural and territorial autonomy.
-  - The Tashkent region has districts that are partly influenced by what the government identifies as extremist organisations, for example “Adolat” and “Hizb-ut-Tahrir”.

Introduction

Uzbekistan is territorially the second largest country in the region and has the largest population, constituting approximately half of the total population in Central Asia. The regional role of Uzbekistan is important both because of its size and resources and because it is the only country that has borders on all other countries in the Central Asian region. Islam Karimov, who was elected the first president in Uzbekistan in December 1991, early began to adopt authoritarian measures in order to consolidate his power in relation to both secular and religious opponents.

The civil war in Tadjikistan and the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan combined with the increasing drugs trafficking was viewed as a threat to the stability in Uzbekistan and served to further strengthen the authoritarian control of the country. In an effort to prevent the increased growth of Islamic movements also in Uzbekistan, the regime has cracked down hard against almost all kind of Islamic groups and has tried to sever the contacts between Islamic groups in Uzbekistan and those in other countries. These measures in combination with an already tight political environment and growing socio-economic hardship has served to radicalise even those groups that earlier were purely religious and lacked a political agenda. The result has become a vicious circle of repression and growing discontent and radicalisation that have been met with more authoritarian measures. Most of the Islamic opposition has been forced underground or has fled the country, but continues their opposition against the regime. If economic and political reforms that could improve the situation for the large part of the population are not implemented, the government risks increasing violent actions.¹

The American operation in Afghanistan has had a direct impact on Uzbekistan that is likely to affect the internal stability of the country as well. Even though Uzbekistan has only agreed to allow the USA to use its territory for humanitarian, reconnaissance and rescue operations in Afghanistan, many people in the country fear the response of the radical Islamic forces. Perhaps the government reaction to this fear is an even worse threat to the Uzbek society. There have already been signs that the government has stepped up its persecutions of alleged Islamic radical extremists, which risks increasing the opposition between, on the one hand, both ordinary Muslims and more radical Islamic forces and, on the other, the regime of the country. An indication are the trials held against nine members of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir in October 2001 that apart from the usual charges also included alleged connections with Osama bin Laden, which sets a dangerous new precedent. The accused were sentenced to long prison terms despite a lack of evidence.²

¹ Compare for example with ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>.

² Ketbenbaev, Urakbai (2001) "Uzbekistan: the Yanks Are Coming", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting Central Asia*, No.74, 12 October, downloaded from the Internet 17 October 2001 on info@iwpr.net and Khojaev, Said: "Tashkent Cracks Down on Islamists", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting Central Asia*, No.74, 12 October, downloaded from the Internet 17 October 2001 on info@iwpr.net.

Ethnic Strife, Military Capabilities and Constraints

Uzbekistan has the most significant military capabilities of the Central Asian countries. The total armed forces in Uzbekistan number around 50,000 to 55,000 active people, including staff at the Ministry of Defence and centrally controlled units. The army has 40,000 men and Uzbekistan also has a quite large paramilitary, estimated to between 18,000 and 20,000 men of which 17,000 to 19,000 belong to the internal security troops. The Uzbek air force has approximately 10,000 to 15,000 personnel according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in the report on the military balance for 2001.³

The numbers of the military and police force are still disputed. According to the General Secretary of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, the regime of president Karimov has created a “huge machine” of 40,000 security police in Tashkent alone and has a nation-wide recruitment of as many as 2,000 informants per month. While these figures obviously should be taken with a large amount of caution, it is probably safe to conclude that the government spends increasing amounts on the security services and correspondingly less on the basic needs of people.⁴ There is a quite large amount of army reservists in Uzbekistan, estimated to around 100,000. Uzbekistan has moved rapidly to increase the percentage of ethnic Uzbek officers in the armed forces that were a mere six per cent when the country gained independence. By 1997, the proportions of Uzbek and Slav officers had been almost reversed with nearly 85 per cent of the total number of officers being ethnic Uzbeks.⁵ Military expenditures were two per cent of GDP in 1997.⁶

The Uzbekistan Border Troop Commands was established in 1992 on the basis of the former Soviet Central Asian Border Troops District and in 1994 it became under the control of the Ministry of Internal Security. The border troops initially worked in close cooperation with the Russian Border Troops Command under a 1992 agreement that provided for Russian training of all Uzbek border troops and joint control of the Afghan border. The border troops were still very limited in 1996, comprising approximately 1,000 troops and they constitute the weakest part of the Uzbek defence in the autumn 2001 as well. The Uzbek police force was estimated to about 25,000 people in 1996 that since independence has been given training in Western techniques under a programme by the United States Department of Justice. Nevertheless, it will probably take more measures and longer time to root out the widespread organised crime and corruption in Uzbekistan and within the law enforcement community itself. As an indication of the deeply entrenched corruption and organised crime within this community, about 25 per cent of the police officers taking part in a survey in the mid-1990s agreed that other officers were involved in the sale of drugs or taking bribes.⁷

³ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2001) *The Military Balance 2001/2002*, London, Oxford University Press, p.171.

⁴ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.2.

⁵ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, pp.101-102.

⁶ CIA (2000) *The World Factbook 2000. Uzbekistan*. (online), downloaded from the Internet 11 November 2001 on <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html>.

⁷ Lubin, Nancy (1997) “Uzbekistan” in Glenn E. Curtis (ed.) *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan: Country Studies*, Washington, Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, pp.464-467.

Immediately after independence from the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan supported the development of close military cooperation within the CIS framework because of the sensitive situation in Afghanistan and Tadjikistan, two neighbouring countries with large ethnic Uzbek groups. Uzbekistan consequently joined the Collective Security Treaty in May 1992 and took part in the collective peacekeeping efforts within the treaty framework that started the same year. Uzbekistan also requested the help of Russian border guards on the border to Afghanistan with the aim to curb the smuggling of weapons and other illegal trade.⁸ This stance changed quickly as Uzbekistan developed their own military forces and Karimov soon appeared particularly opposed to the continuing Russian military presence in Central Asia. Uzbekistan refused to sign the Treaty for the Defence of the CIS External Borders in 1995 and in early 1999 Uzbekistan announced that it would withdraw from the Collective Security Treaty in May the same year, even though they emphasised that the decision would not affect the Uzbek-Russian bilateral agreements.⁹

A Russian newspaper, commenting on the Uzbek decision to leave the CIS defence pact, reported that Uzbekistan also questioned the need for the continued presence of the Russian-dominated CIS peacekeeping force in Tadjikistan. The Uzbek government did not consider the presence of the force necessary since the Mujaheddin of the Islamic opposition had left Afghanistan and to a large extent had become integrated in the Tadjik national army.¹⁰ However, later events and the increased activities of radical Islamic groups in particular, have contributed to a certain degree of rapprochement between Russia and Uzbekistan, even in their views on military matters.¹¹

Because of the strong opposition – represented primarily by the IMU – against Uzbekistan and the regime of President Islam Karimov the need to improve the state of the military forces in Uzbekistan, and the border forces in particular, has been acknowledged internationally. Even if Uzbekistan has the largest armed forces in Central Asia, the border troops are still small and lack resources. In February, the U.S. delivered its first military aid to Uzbekistan in the form of twelve transport vehicles and in April 2000, the U.S. announced that they had earmarked ten million U.S. dollars for Uzbekistan in order to provide training and equipment for counter-terrorism and anti-drug units on the Afghan border.¹² A part of this package was delivered in January 2001, consisting of communications equipment to the value of USD300,000.¹³

⁸ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) "Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.145.

⁹ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, pp.101-110.

¹⁰ RFE/RL Newsline (1999) *Uzbekistan to Leave CIS Defence Pact*, 3 February, downloaded from the Internet 8 November 2001 on <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/1999/02/030299.html>.

¹¹ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, p.102.

¹² Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 17 January, downloaded from the Internet 11 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011701.shtml> and The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2000) *The Military Balance 2000/2001*, London, Oxford University Press, p.159.

¹³ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Namangani's Foray Causes Concern Among Central Asian Governments", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 2 May, downloaded from the Internet 2 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020501.shtml>.

Russia has also stepped up its programme of assistance and exercises in the entire region. When Russia ran the “Southern Shield Exercises” Uzbekistan also chose to take part in some of the exercises that were held on its own territory. This was unexpected, since Uzbekistan usually is very sceptical against any Russian military activities, but the stepped-up activity of Islamic militants during the year 2000 has probably made such activities more acceptable.¹⁴ At the end of January, three IMU militants were killed in a clash with Uzbek security forces near the capital and during the summer incursions in August and September, Uzbek forces fought with more rebels who tried to enter the Ferghana valley. In line with the usual position on military cooperation with Russia, Uzbekistan declined Russian military aid in the spring 2000. In early autumn, Russia nevertheless provided Uzbekistan with weapons, including 50 armoured cars and Mi-8 helicopters. Moreover, as first country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan received military aid from China. This aid included flak jackets, night vision equipment and sniper rifles, all in all worth around USD 365,000.¹⁵

The arbitrarily drawn borders in the region cause problems for all of the Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan. As an example, the main road between Tashkent and Samarkand passes through Kazakh territory.¹⁶ An agreement on the delimitation of the border between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was signed in mid-November 2001, but there were still three disputed areas that would be addressed later.¹⁷ One of the enclaves on Kyrgyz territory that belongs to Uzbekistan, Shakhimardan, is a resort for Muslim pilgrims and harbours a mausoleum of one of the most prominent figures in the Uzbek modern literature, Hamza Hakimzoda Niyozzi. It has been possible to drive across Kyrgyz territory in order to reach the enclave, but this could become more difficult as the nation-building process continues.¹⁸ The IMU incursions have further increased the sensitivity of the border issues and could make the communications between the countries in the region more complicated. After the clashes with the IMU rebels who entered Uzbekistan after crossing Tadjikistan and Kyrgyzstan in January 2000, Uzbekistan demanded that the two neighbours tighten security along their borders. Moreover, Uzbekistan began to unilaterally demarcate the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border in the Fergana valley and stopped all rail and road traffic to Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan for several weeks.¹⁹

The border with Afghanistan and the ethnic Uzbek minority living in Northern Afghanistan have caused worries also before the U.S.-attacks on Afghanistan in the autumn 2001. Uzbekistan reinforced its military presence on the Uzbek-Afghan border after the Taliban

¹⁴ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2000) *The Military Balance 2000/2001*, London, Oxford University Press, p.159.

¹⁵ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 17 January, downloaded from the Internet 11 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011701.shtml>.

¹⁶ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) “Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt” in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.156.

¹⁷ Khabar Television: “Kazakh, Uzbek heads welcome end to territorial disputes”, 16 November 2001 in *BBC Monitoring Global Newsline – Central Asia Political*, 17 November 2001, from BBC Monitoring topic@mon.bbc.co.uk.

¹⁸ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) “Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt” in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.156.

¹⁹ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 17 January, downloaded from the Internet 11 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011701.shtml>.

conquest of Kabul in the autumn of 1996 and tried to establish the northern Afghan regions as a buffer zone. The substantial influence of the ethnic Uzbeks in the Afghan civil war has led to suspicion about the role of their titular country. Uzbekistan has been suspected of supporting the Northern Alliance and the ethnic Uzbek warlord, General Abdurrashid Dostum, with both civil and military assistance. When the Taliban defeated Dostum and reached the Uzbek border, the situation got significantly more serious, leading to both increased contacts with the other Central Asian states and with Russia, especially when Uzbekistan began to realise that the international community would not give any specific security guarantees. At the first visit of Russian president Boris Yeltsin to Uzbekistan in October 1998, the Taliban was a topical issue for the discussions that resulted in the signing of an agreement promising help in case one of the countries was attacked.²⁰

Socio-Economic Factors

Production of cotton and natural gas are the most important parts of the Uzbek economy and was earlier primarily exported to Russia. Like in the other Central Asian states, the country's economy was largely based on production of raw material, but Uzbekistan also combined extraction of, for example, gold, coal and copper with some manufacturing and had a larger internal market than the other states in the region.²¹ Like the other Central Asian states, Uzbekistan entered into a period of recession at the beginning of independence (although the crisis in Uzbekistan was worse in late 1991 to 1992 rather than earlier in 1991 and 1990). However, due to the active intervention of the state, the recession was rather mild in Uzbekistan compared with the other post-Soviet states.²²

Uzbekistan has managed to extend the country's foreign economic links quite successfully. In 1996, the share of the former Soviet republics in the foreign trade was no more than 28 per cent at the same time as the trade with the United States, Germany and South Korea was growing. The trade with China has also increased and the two countries have signed several trade agreements. In the post-Soviet area, Uzbekistan has given priority to the development of the economic links with the other Central Asian states as the CAU formed between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 1994 can be seen as an example of, but Russia nevertheless remains the single largest trading partner.²³

Increasingly, the centralised control of the economy and lack of further reforms has threatened the earlier relative economic success and scared off most foreign investors.²⁴ The heavy industry remains under government control and the largest exports, including cotton and gold, are in the hands of a few people who gain and lose their positions because of their relations to the president. Estimates indicate that as much as 70 per cent of the gross national

²⁰ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, p.99-103.

²¹ Zubarevich, Natalia V. & Fedorov, Yuri E. (1999) "Russian-Southern Economic Interaction" in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., pp.122-123.

²² Gafarly, M.S. & Rass, V.F. (2001) "The Preservation of the State's Dominant Position in the Economy" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.102.

²³ *Uzbekistan*. Länder i fickformat, nr.915 (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, pp.22-27.

²⁴ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, p.85.

product continues to be generated by state-owned or state-financed enterprises.²⁵ Uzbekistan has adopted policies of import substitution in the oil and gas sectors. The economy has still made some progress, at least according to national statistics, and the prospects for good cotton harvests and rising production in minerals and metals could shelter the Uzbek economy from some of the problems experienced by its neighbours. However, the economy as a whole remains perilously dependent on the agricultural sector and the overall prospects are not promising if the current economic policy is maintained, even if some sectors might prosper.²⁶

In 2000, the economy declined further and the authoritarian control of the economy maintained by President Karimov prevented several agreements with the IMF and the World Bank. Due to the tight currency control and lack of a legal framework for investments, foreign investments were low. When Uzbekistan announced a major privatisation campaign of state assets, including oil companies, there were no foreign takers. In August, China agreed to set up a joint venture with six companies in Uzbekistan as the only foreign country.²⁷ However, there have been other foreign companies in the country established earlier of which several countries have rather extensive projects going on, like the South Korean Daewoo car-manufacturing company.

Standards of living, employment and prospects for life improvement

Despite an early and relative success of the Uzbek authorities in handling the economic recession, the standards of living have worsened considerably due to the economic recession and high level of inflation. Around 40 per cent of the population were estimated to be living below the poverty line before independence and the figure rose during the first years after independence. The former Soviet social security system is still in place but the real value of the benefits has dropped considerably due to the high level of inflation. Students, retired people and other low-income groups get extra benefits and some groups have their taxes reduced and sometimes do not have to pay rent.²⁸ According to the EBRD estimate for 1999, 29 per cent of the population was estimated to live in poverty according to a level of four dollar-a-day, which is the best figure in all Central Asia, largely explained by the comparatively high level of social protection.²⁹ The standard of living varies considerably in different parts of the country, however. The situation is worst in the densely populated rural areas around the major oases and in the fertile Ferghana valley where most of the population (around 60 per cent) live. The rising poverty combined with the growing population threatens to cause further unrest in these areas.³⁰

²⁵ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.21.

²⁶ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, pp.83-86.

²⁷ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 17 January, downloaded from the Internet 11 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011701.shtml>.

²⁸ *Uzbekistan*. Länder i fickformat, nr.915 (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, p.31.

²⁹ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1999) *Transition Report 1999. Ten Years of Transition*, London, EBRD, pp.283-284.

³⁰ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, p.82.

Islam Karimov has stated that Islamic militants are able to find recruits because of the disastrous socio-economic conditions experienced by most Uzbeks, demographic problems in some regions, mass unemployment and economic insecurity, especially for the young. This has prompted the president to decree an around 40 per cent rise in the minimum wage and pension benefits and to call for structural economic reforms as the country can not rely on production of raw materials and semi-finished goods alone. These proposed measures still need to be implemented, however. The investor interest in the Uzbek industry appears low and privatisation proceeds slowly. The combined effect of the failure of the government to address economic issues and the simultaneous repression of the freedom of religious expression has already caused popular unrest and will probably cause further dissatisfaction as well.³¹

When the government's obligation to provide the population with employment was abolished in 1992, the level of unemployment rose sharply. The actual level of unemployment is hard to measure because many people are still formally employed, but without having any work tasks or receiving payment. At the mid-1990s approximately two million people were estimated to be unemployed or under-employed, but very few of them were registered as unemployed. Only the people who are registered as unemployed receive unemployment benefits. The problem is further exacerbated by the rapid population growth.³² The level of unemployment is higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas. The high level of unemployment has consequences for the maintenance of ethnic calm as well. Since most of the ethnic Uzbeks live in the rural areas, where work in the agricultural sector or as traders in the local markets are the main occupations, a disproportionate part of the Uzbeks are unemployed in comparison to other ethnic groups, which has caused ethnic tensions.³³

³¹ "Government Response to IMU Threat Fuels Radicalism in Uzbekistan" (2001) *Eurasianet.org*, 24 July, downloaded from the Internet 1 August 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org>. See also Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.97.

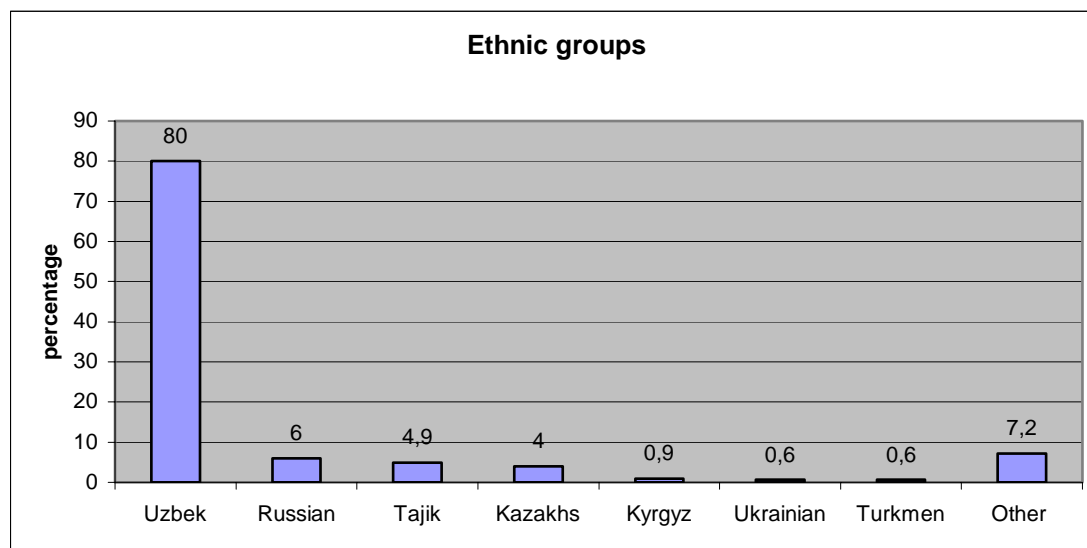
³² *Uzbekistan. Länder i fickformat*, nr.915 (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, p.30.

³³ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) "Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.151.

Ethnically Related Threats

The ethnic composition of Uzbekistan

Figure 8. Ethnic groups in Uzbekistan



Uzbekistan is the most ethnically homogenous country in the Central Asian region. The titular population comprises 80 per cent of the total population (estimated to approximately 24.7 million people in July 2000) according to official statistics. There are nearly one and a half million ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan, which makes them the largest minority group, but they are only six per cent of the total population.³⁴ Islam has a consolidated and stable position among the Uzbek, Tadjik, Kyrgyz and Turkmen parts of the population. However, fears have been raised that elements among the local Tadjiks, constituting nearly five per cent of the population, could become a source of political as well as Islamic terrorism in Uzbekistan. The Tadjik part of the population in Uzbekistan have made requests about the formation of an independent territory and strengthened cultural autonomy in the regions of Samarkand and Bukhara. These Tadjik ambitions could have a destabilising impact on the political and social situation in Uzbekistan.³⁵

The close to one million Tadjiks living in Uzbekistan have periodically been pressured towards becoming more “Uzbek”, both under the Soviet rule and during independence, which exacerbates the fear of potential interethnic tensions. The number of schools giving education in the Tadjik language has been severely restricted, before as well as after independence, and many Tadjiks living in Uzbekistan were registered as Uzbeks by force during the Soviet era

³⁴ CIA (2000) *The World Factbook 2000. Uzbekistan*. (online), downloaded from the Internet 11 November 2001 on <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html>. According to the UNDP the population in Uzbekistan was 24.5 million in 2000, see ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.1.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, downloaded from the Internet on <http://www.hrw.org>; Romanova, N. (1999) *Ethno-Political Processes*, Almaty and *The Report on Social Research in Kazakhstan: Religious Extremism as a Factor of the Unstable Situation in Central Asia* (2000) Almaty, Centre of Humanitarian Research.

and had this nationality written in their passports. This assimilation policy has been most severe for the above-mentioned Tadjik minorities in Bukhara and Samarkand. In 1992, demonstrations held in this area by ethnic Tadjiks expressing discontent about the Uzbek language replacing the Russian as the official state language were brutally dispersed by the Uzbek authorities.³⁶ The Tadjik civil war caused further problems for the Tadjiks in Bukhara and Samarkand who wanted to help fleeing refugees, which was prevented by the government that tried to cut off all links with Tadjikistan.³⁷

Despite the relative political stability maintained by President Islam Karimov, emigration of the Russian population has increased. Since the Uzbek society is the most “Islamised” and traditional in Central Asia and comparatively ethnically homogeneous, the Russians living in Uzbekistan have felt particularly alien after Uzbekistan gained independence.³⁸ This has caused many Russians to leave Uzbekistan, as will be further developed below. Approximately 16 per cent of the population in Uzbekistan are Russian-speaking of whom less than half are ethnic Russians, but this group has formed a backbone of the skilled working force in Uzbekistan, especially the specially trained working class, technical intelligentsia and physicians. Russia initially insisted on dual citizenship for the Russian-speaking population, which is something the Uzbek government has declared unacceptable. In an effort to try to preserve good relations with Uzbekistan, Moscow seems to have chosen not to push the issue of the Russian-speaking population too hard.³⁹

Nevertheless, even the Uzbek authorities admit that, among others, questions of language, children’s education and preservation of cultural traditions will be hard for the ethnic Russians remaining in Uzbekistan during the coming years. The problems for the around 2.5 million Russian-speakers will probably be the most difficult.⁴⁰ Uzbek was declared the official language of Uzbekistan in October 1989 and the conditions for the gradual replacement of the Russian language with the Uzbek language in official functions were presented. In 1993, the parliament decided that a Latin alphabet should replace the Uzbek Cyrillic alphabet over a five-year-period from 1995 to 2000. All in all, the Russian language is likely to lose its position as both *lingua franca* and generally understood second language as new generations are born.⁴¹

The titular population of the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakistan (estimated to 2.5 per cent of the total population in 1996) in western Uzbekistan proclaimed the region’s independence in December 1990. A movement working for an independent Karakalpakistan was registered in the republic a year later. The strivings for independence are not likely to be

³⁶ Petersson, Bo (1996) “Tadjikistan – ändlösa konflikter i en artificiell stat”? in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.79.

³⁷ *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.17.

³⁸ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) “Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.237.

³⁹ Petrov, N.I. (2001) “Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime” in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.98-99.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.99.

⁴¹ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) “Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt” in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.153-155. The rest of the education (less than 10 per cent) is given in some of the other minority languages.

successful, however. Karakalpakistan covers approximately one third of the entire Uzbek territory, which the central regime is not likely to abandon. Moreover, the whole republic is an environmental disaster area since it is situated close to the increasingly desiccated Aral Sea that will require huge resources to mitigate, which is something the poor republic lacks. Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that there are almost as many ethnic Uzbeks living in Karakalpakistan as there are Karakalpaks. There is education held in the Karakalpak language, which is a Turkic language closer to the Kazakh language than the Uzbek.⁴²

The complex ethnic composition of the newly independent Central Asian states is, however, not only an impediment for Uzbekistan. While acknowledging the difficulties posed by the ethnic minorities on Uzbek territory, the borders also works to Uzbekistan's advantage since the substantial Uzbek diaspora living in southern Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Tadjikistan constitute a considerable political force in these countries, which Tashkent can use to its advantage.⁴³ The Uzbek diaspora living on the other side of the Uzbek-Afghan border is viewed with more suspicion, since the Uzbek authorities fear that there could be a growing ground for different forms of opposition against the present Uzbek regime among this group.⁴⁴

Migration trends and refugees

Between 1989 and 1992, 143,400 people migrated from Uzbekistan to Russia, which is more than from any other Central Asian country. A large amount of people have applied for Russian citizenship during the last years, which is almost always granted, although the difficulties involved in the selling of apartments for a fair price and transportation of possessions to Russia are considerable. The exodus of the skilled Russian population causes major concern for the Uzbek authorities, especially of those working in industries where Russians form the majority.⁴⁵ One of the concrete main reasons for the Russian emigration from Uzbekistan has been their lack of knowledge of the Uzbek language. The Uzbek government has tried to retain the Russian specialists needed especially in the high-technology sectors and health care at the same time as it has helped ethnic Uzbeks to gain key posts. As the numbers of locally skilled personnel grows and the country develops a policy for training experts abroad the Uzbek government will probably become less prone to keep the Russians from emigrating.⁴⁶

⁴² CIA (2000) *The World Factbook 2000. Uzbekistan*. (online), downloaded from the Internet 11 November 2001 on <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uz.html>; Lubin, Nancy (1997) "Uzbekistan" in Glenn E. Curtis (ed.) *Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan: Country Studies*, Washington, Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, pp.407-408 and Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) "Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, pp.129-157.

⁴³ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.96.

⁴⁴ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) "Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.146.

⁴⁵ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.98-99.

⁴⁶ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) "Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South" in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.237.

Judging from the country's earlier behaviour, Uzbekistan would not be likely to accept any refugees resulting from the Afghan civil war and the American attacks on Afghanistan, even if they were ethnic Uzbeks. Moreover, in comparison to the porous Tadjik border, the Uzbek-Afghan border is relatively well protected and hard to penetrate despite the fact that the Uzbek border troops are the weakest link in the Uzbek defence. President Karimov has not shown any particular willingness to accept ethnic Uzbeks coming to Uzbekistan from neighbouring states in the past, going so far as to deport ethnic Uzbeks who fled Tadjikistan during the civil war.⁴⁷ As late as March 2001, about 50 ethnic Uzbeks holding Tadjik citizenship who had escaped from Tadjikistan to the Surkhan-Darya region near the Tadjik border during the Tadjik civil war were forcefully deported back to the Tadjik border. The government claimed that their proximity to Tadjikistan could facilitate collaboration with the IMU.⁴⁸

The local level and the importance of informal politics

Families and clans have continued to play an important role in the Uzbek society. There are six major clans from different geographical regions of the country that compete for power and influence in Uzbekistan. Islam Karimov belongs to the so-called western clan from the Samarkand-Jizzakh area that has been the most influential clan during the last half century. The other clans are represented in the government in proportion to their estimated present strength.⁴⁹ When President Karimov came to power he was quite successful in balancing the different regional groups and playing them off one against another. However, as he consolidated his power, it became increasingly clear that he had favoured people from the Samarkand elite who held the majority of the official posts. As a consequence, people from other regions and clans have felt increasingly neglected in the allocation of financial resources and power. According to the International Crisis Group, the discontent of those who feel they have lost out in Karimov's consolidation of power is one of the most serious potential sources of instability in present-day Uzbekistan.⁵⁰

Evidence of kinship patronage is even more abundant than the extensive regional patronage system. Loyalty to the president is essential for acquiring a good job and many businesses are run by relatives to people in the government. This ensures the continued strong connection between economics and politics in the country and diminishes the potential for any person who lacks the right political connections to promote a career. It has also resulted in a widespread corruption that is further nurtured by the centralised rule of Islam Karimov.⁵¹

⁴⁷ ICG (2001) *Central Asian Perspectives on 11 September and the Afghan Crisis*, Central Asia Briefing, Osh/Brussels 28 September, downloaded from the Internet 2 October 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=439>.

⁴⁸ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.20.

⁴⁹ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) "Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.151.

⁵⁰ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, pp.16-26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

Religiously Related Threats

The religious composition of the population in Uzbekistan

The major part of the population in Uzbekistan is Sunni Muslim, around 88 to 90 per cent according to official information. There are also some Shiah Muslims in Uzbekistan, primarily among the Tadjik ethnic group. As with the Shiites, the radical extremist groups in Uzbekistan are largely concentrated to the Ferghana valley in the eastern part of Uzbekistan where the influence of Wahhabism can be found. Unfortunately, however, there is no official information about the Wahhabis in Uzbekistan.⁵²

Islam has always been important in the Uzbek society and the Muslim population adhered to the Muslim traditions to a large extent even during the Soviet era. In 1988 to 1991 an Islamic revival took place in Uzbekistan also contributing to the rise of many extremist tendencies.⁵³ The strong Islamic revival in Uzbekistan and the increase of Islamic extremist groups and activities in Uzbekistan has strong significance for the whole Central Asian region. Uzbekistan has by tradition been the most Islamic country in the region, but it is also the most populous country in Central Asia and the only Central Asian country that borders all the other countries in the region.

Radical Islam in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is one of the Central Asian countries that have been most affected by Islamisation, but this influence varies considerably between the different regions of the country. The Spiritual Directorate, that is the supreme religious body, is traditionally loyal to those in power and was pressured by lower affiliates during the late 1980s. Both unofficial and official mullahs with more radical agendas gathered Muslims in an effort to depose the incumbent Mufti, who heads the Directorate, in 1989 and 1990, but the authorities managed to disperse the demonstrators. As a consequence, the *Islamic Renaissance Party* emerged to gather the Islamic opposition with many unofficial mullahs among them.⁵⁴

The authorities immediately took measures to prevent the establishment of this and other parties with similar religious agendas. In February 1991, a law was passed that, among other things, bans the creation of political parties with religious programmes.⁵⁵ The government has tried to promote a moderate form of Islam, for example through the state-controlled

⁵² Babadzanov, B. (1999) "The Fergana Valley: Source or Victim of Islamic Fundamentalism", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol.5, No.4; Burkhanov, K.N. (2000) *Extremism in Central Asia*, Almaty, Agance France Press and *The Report on Social Research in Kazakhstan: Religious Extremism as a Factor of the Unstable Situation in Central Asia* (2000) Almaty, Centre of Humanitarian Research.

⁵³ Burkhanov, K.N. (2000) *Extremism in Central Asia*, Almaty, Agance France Press; *Interview with Akhmad T. Kakhorov*, Attaché of the Embassy of the Republic of Tadjikistan in Kazakhstan, conducted by Olga Melkova, Almaty, 13 January 2001; Ponomarev, V. (1999) "Mass Repression in Uzbekistan as a Factor of Destabilisation", *Shapagat Nur*, No.11, December; Sergeinko, V. (2000) "Political Islam in Central Asia", *Continent*, 19 April – 2 May and Vasi, Ahmad (1999) "Bleeding Wound of Islamic Umma", *Shapagat Nur*, No.1, February.

⁵⁴ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.80.

⁵⁵ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) "Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.141.

madrassas (theological colleges), and deviations from the unofficial form have been suppressed. Several independent clerics have been arrested or removed from their positions in a drive that was intensified when the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1996.⁵⁶ These measures to ensure government control of the local Muslim communities have been taken despite the fact that religion and state are officially separate according to the constitution. The current Mufti was appointed by the president, which also contradicts the official separation between religion and the state. He is viewed with suspicion by many members of the Muslim community, making it hard for the government to influence the religious development in the country.⁵⁷

The authorities have oscillated between periods of relative liberalisation and periods of reprisals and have also given some generous promises to the Islamists, but all have not been implemented. The promise to introduce compulsory religious education has, for example, remained on paper and the fear of Islamic fundamentalism remains very strong among the authorities. The Islamic opposition is nevertheless active and makes no attempts to conceal its criticism against the sitting regime.⁵⁸ In addition to the many religious organisations that have been formed during the post-communist period there are a number of more or less secret religious associations in Uzbekistan that have been in the area for several centuries and now seem to be gaining increasing support and strength. Examples include the secret and mystic Sufi brotherhoods. The geographically most dispersed and numerically strongest Sufi brotherhood, the *Naqshbandiya*, was founded in Bukhara in the twelfth century. The *Kubrawiya* and the *Qalandariya* are two other Sufi brotherhoods with most of their members in Karakalpakstan.⁵⁹

The Fergana valley is today viewed as a centre for various extremist traits that could spread to the rest of the country. The fact that the region is less developed than the rest of Uzbekistan from a social and economic perspective has undoubtedly contributed to the strong position held by the religious extremist organisations in the region. Some of these organisations have as a goal to establish an Islamic state in the entire Central Asian region. The adherence of orthodox Sunni Islam of different varieties seems to grow very fast among the unemployed and young population in the Fergana valley that are getting involved in the radical religious and political activities led by extremist organisations. Some of the extremist Islamic organisations in Uzbekistan receive financial and ideological support from fellow extremist organisations in the neighbouring countries, such as Afghanistan and Tadjikistan.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, p.53.

⁵⁷ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, pp.12-15.

⁵⁸ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.80.

⁵⁹ Schlyter, Birgit N. (1996) "Uzbekistan – från bomullskoloni till regional stormakt" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.141.

⁶⁰ Burkhanov, K.N. (2000) *Extremism in Central Asia*, Almaty, Agance France Press; *Interview with Akhmad T. Kakhorov*, Attaché of the Embassy of the Republic of Tadjikistan in Kazakhstan, conducted by Olga Melkova, Almaty, 13 January 2001; Ponomarev, V. (1999) "Mass Repression in Uzbekistan as a Factor of Destabilisation", *Shapagat Nur*, No.11, December; Sergeenko, V. (2000) "Political Islam in Central Asia", *Continent*, 19 April – 2 May and Vasi, Ahmad (1999) "Bleeding Wound of Islamic Umma", *Shapagat Nur*, No.1, February.

The civil war in Tadjikistan has been used as a pretext for persecutions of Islamic groups, of which the *Islamic Renaissance Party*, founded as an Uzbek branch in 1991 and immediately banned, and the *Adolat Ujushmashy* (The Organisation of Justice) described below can be seen as examples. Although the former party managed to collect the 3,000 signatures required for registration, the party was denied it. Adolat was originally quite strong, which caused concerns for the authorities that responded with arrests of many activists, sentencing them for creating an illegal organisation. There are several such strictly religious groups based in the Ferghana valley that are viewed as a threat by the Uzbek regime. The valley is overpopulated and the level of unemployment is as high as 35 per cent. This has worsened the economic and social problems, especially in the urban areas, that create a breeding ground for Islamic fundamentalism.⁶¹ The Namangan region, that is one of the three Uzbek regions in the Ferghana valley, has given rise to a substantial number of Islamic organisations and is consequently subject to particular government suspicion. This suspicion is reportedly mutual and even hostile feelings towards the central government are mounting.⁶²

According to the head of the nongovernmental organisation Human Rights Society in Uzbekistan, there are tens of thousands innocent young Muslims imprisoned in Uzbekistan. The relatives and friends of these people have caused several public riots in many districts of Uzbekistan following their demonstrations against the imprisonments. The riots have been put down harshly by the Uzbek authorities, which are bound to create more dissatisfaction among the Muslims in Uzbekistan.⁶³ The authorities' methods for handling the political and religious situation in Uzbekistan have been questioned by many observers. As an example, a Russian researcher writes that the more democratically minded politicians and newspapers in Moscow express doubts about whether the authoritarian regime of Islam Karimov that allows neither secular nor Islamic opposition any significant political space, does not counteract its own purposes. According to many observers in Russia, who are generally suspicious about the threat of radicalised Islam, it would be better if a relatively loyal opposition would develop in Uzbekistan, than for the much more dangerous Islamic fundamentalism to grow stronger, first underground and later in the open.⁶⁴

The organisation *Hizb-ut-Tahrir*, further described below, claims that there are between 50,000 and 100,000 Muslims in Uzbek concentration camps. These figures are not confirmed, but International Crisis Group's fieldwork reports that there have been large-scale arrests and the government acknowledges the existence of camps.⁶⁵ Amnesty International reported in June 2000 that Uzbekistan had sentenced 55 people and executed 15 people since the

⁶¹ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.84 and *Uzbekistan. Länder i fickformat*, nr.915 (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, p.21.

⁶² ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.18.

⁶³ Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran: "Uzbek riots caused by mass impoverishment – rights activist", 3 July 2001 in *BBC Monitoring Global Newslines – Central Asia Political*, 4 July 2001, from BBC Monitoring topic@mon.bbc.co.uk.

⁶⁴ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.83.

⁶⁵ Evans, Gareth: "Force is Not the Way to Meet Central Asia's Islamist Threat", *International Herald Tribune*, 10-11 March 2001.

beginning of 1999.⁶⁶ As was mentioned above, the suppression of religious groups or individuals can have inter-ethnic tensions as a consequence as well. In June 2001 Uzbek courts condemned 73 ethnic Tadjiks from the southern Surkhandarya region to prison terms ranging from three to 18 years charged of supporting the activities of the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* (IMU). The proceedings were held and the verdicts read without prior announcement, declaring all defendants guilty of providing IMU fighters with food and lodging, showing them mountain pathways and conducting foreign currency transactions with the militants with no material evidence presented to support the charges.⁶⁷

The inter-ethnic aspect of the religious threat is also proven in relation to the intensified crackdown against alleged radical Islamists after a series of bomb blasts in the capital Tashkent in February 1999 that may have been an assassination attempt on President Karimov. Karimov has been particularly concerned about the infiltration of unsanctioned Islam from other countries and he claimed that the majority of the so-called “religious fanatics” involved in the bomb attack were undergoing training in Chechnya, Afghanistan and Tadjikistan. Even though most of the people detained were citizens of Uzbekistan, Karimov emphasised that there were many ethnic Tadjik citizens of Uzbekistan who underwent such training in radical Islamic camps in Tadjikistan. IMU was one of the groups accused of being involved in the attack, further increasing the inter-state tension between Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan as well because of the IMU camps in the latter country.⁶⁸

Two years later, in the summer of 2001, the ethnic Tadjiks were once more made scapegoats as 73 ethnic Tadjiks were imprisoned for alleged collaboration with the IMU fighters that had attacked the southern Uzbek border the year before, despite very weak evidence. The homes of ethnic Tadjiks living close to the Uzbek border were destroyed and the families who were forced from their homes due to the attack were offered only poorly equipped accommodation at a camp. This has increased sentiments that Tadjiks are treated unfairly in Uzbekistan.⁶⁹

Radical Islamic organisations

Uzbekistan has become the host to a number of more or less radical Islamic organisations on the regional and national level. A number of these groups have found quite broad support, especially in the Ferghana valley. In addition to the earlier mentioned organisations, examples include *Islam Lashkarlari* (Warriors of Islam), *Tovba* (Repentance), *Akramiya* and the *Hizbollah*. At present, there is also a small group of Shiah Muslims operating underground in Uzbekistan. Islam Lashkarlari originated in the city of Namangan and spread to the rest of the Fergana valley between 1991 and 1992 with the aim to establish an Islamic state. Some of its members, including the present leader of the IMU, Tohir Yoldoshev, later fled to Tadjikistan in order to escape the government persecutions where many ended up fighting with the

⁶⁶ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 17 January, downloaded from the Internet 11 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011701.shtml>.

⁶⁷ Struthers, Marie (2001) "Human Rights Activist Provides a View of Tashkent Trials", *Eurasianet.org*, 10 July, downloaded from the Internet 23 July 2001 on www.eurasianet.org.

⁶⁸ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.6 and Melvin, Neil J. (2000) *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road*, Amsteldijk, Harwood Academic Publishers, p.53-57.

⁶⁹ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, pp.19-20.

opposition in the civil war. Tovba is another organisation from the Namangan region that was banned in 1992. The Akramiya is a radical off-shot of Hizb-ut-Tahrir still operating underground in Uzbekistan, as are some of the limited groups following the Wahhabi movement in the true sense. These are mainly confined to the Ferghana valley and have been under the influence of Wahhabi activists from Saudi Arabia. Some other groups have left the Ferghana valley for Tadjikistan, Afghanistan and Iran.⁷⁰

The Islamic Renaissance Party is one of the groups that wish to introduce the Islamic laws, *shariya*, for believers, but it does not want to overthrow the present regime by force.⁷¹ When the organisation was banned in 1992, it was believed to have around 50,000 followers, mainly from the Ferghana valley centres of Namangan and Andijan. These areas have been subject to some of the most severe efforts by the government to crack down on unofficial Islamic groups like the campaigns in which several hundreds of members of the Islamic Renaissance Party were arrested.⁷² Groups of Adolat began forming in the early autumn of 1991 in the Namangan region and later spread to the Ferghana and Andijan regions as well with the aim to combat criminals and violators of the shariya laws. In total there were more than 60 groups and detachments consisting of 15 to 2000 members each. Of the activists that were arrested by the authorities, most were later released after public pressure, but the measure seems to have had effect in the respect that the organisation's activities subsequently were considerably reduced.⁷³ Adolat has been in control of the social life in the Namangan region, situated in the Ferghana valley. The goal of Adolat has been to build an Islamic state and the organisation was banned in March 1992. The Hizb-ut-Tahrir party that was founded in Uzbekistan in 1995 has worked in contact with Adolat.⁷⁴

Hizb-ut-Tahrir is generally considered as an ultra extremist organisation in Uzbekistan. The organisation has regional divisions in Samarkand, Tashkent and Ferghana oblasts, although its strongest position is in the latter region. Apart from the connection with Adolat, Hizb-ut-Tahrir is also reputed to have close contacts with the Tadjik extremist organisation *Brother-Muslims* and the Hizbollah.⁷⁵ The Hizbollah Islamic Group was illegal from the time it was founded. Hizbollah demands the return to the Shariyatic laws in Uzbekistan and the strengthening of moral principles based on Islamic traditions. The group is small with an estimated number of members ranging between 50 and 300 activists of which most are young.⁷⁶ It is established in the Ferghana valley and according to Ahmed Rashid, who has

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.13-15.

⁷¹ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.84.

⁷² ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.13.

⁷³ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.84.

⁷⁴ Bazarov, A. (1997) "The Islamic Factor and Socio-Political Stability in Uzbekistan", *Ethnic and Regional Conflicts in Eurasia*; Burkhanov, K.N. (2000) *Extremism in Central Asia*, Almaty, Agance France Press and Rotar, I.: "Wahhabism in the Republics of the Former Soviet Union", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11 August 1998.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Petrov, N.I. (2001) "Political Stability in the Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, s.84.

written extensively about Islam in Central Asia, it follows Saudi Arabia's strict Wahhabi sect and is also funded by Saudi groups.⁷⁷

Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which has growing support not only in Uzbekistan but also in Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan, is one of the movements that aim to unite Central Asia in an Islamic caliphate. According to information from the group's own homepage, the earlier cooperation between this organisation and the Wahhabi movement ended because Hizb-ut-Tahrir wanted to introduce the religious laws, *shariya*, with peaceful means, whereas the Wahhabis preferred guerrilla warfare. This could be seen as evidence that the present regime, which as we have seen identifies Hizb-ut-Tahrir as an ultra extremist organisation, tends to exaggerate the threat posed by the Islamic groups. The risk of this exaggeration is reflected in the prediction by a senior leader of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, who said in an interview with Ahmed Rashid that he thought there still will be war, despite their peaceful intentions, because of the strong repression from the Uzbek and the other Central Asian regimes.⁷⁸

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan has had as its special mission to overthrow the secular regime under President Islam Karimov that they view as a betrayal against the Islamic faith in Uzbekistan. During the incursion into Kyrgyzstan in 1999, the IMU demanded that President Karimov should release 50,000 prisoners held in Uzbekistan on terrorist charges of which most were Muslims as a condition for the IMU to release the hostages they had taken on Kyrgyz soil. Juma Namangani also claimed that he and his supporters, who were estimated to number approximately 400 people at the time, would launch an Islamic crusade against Uzbekistan.⁷⁹

However, the movement seems to have increasingly broadened their agenda. According to a message from the IMU leaders, Tohir Yoldoshev and Juma Namangani, all radical Islamic groups and parties in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan and China's autonomous Xienjiang-Uighur region are now included in their movement, which they have renamed as the Islamic Movement of Turkestan. The present goal of the renamed movement is to establish an Islamic caliphate that unites not only the Central Asian region but also eastern Turkestan (in the northeast of China that is dominated by ethnic Muslim Uighurs). The new movement – or party, which is the literal translation – was set up in the Afghan town Dehadi and is today reported to include Chechens, Arabs and Pakistanis apart from people from the above-mentioned countries.⁸⁰ The degree of truth of this statement is not verified, but it nevertheless points to the ambitions held by parts of the movement's leadership. If the IMU strengthens its contacts with other radical Islamic groups in the region it will be a much greater force to be reckoned with in Central Asia.

⁷⁷ Rashid, Ahmed (2000) "Asking for Holy War", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 9 November, p.30.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.28-30.

⁷⁹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2000) *The Military Balance 2000/2001*, London, Oxford University Press, p.159.

⁸⁰ Kabar news agency: "Kyrgyz defence official says new radical Islamic party set up in Central Asia", *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political*, 25 May 2001, downloaded on the Internet on Reuters Business Briefing 18 September 2001, Kabar news agency: "Uzbek terrorist movement said transformed into Islamic Party", *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political*, 24 May 2001, downloaded on the Internet on Reuters Business Briefing 18 September 2001 and *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 29 May 2001, p.5.

Economically Related Threats

Illegal trade

One of the roots of potential regional conflicts identified as a security threat towards Uzbekistan by President Karimov is found in the drug smuggling, even though Uzbekistan is probably less involved in the drug trade than Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan (even though the actual level of the drug trade is hard to estimate due to the widespread corruption in Uzbekistan). According to the deputy head of the Interior's Ministry's department for fighting drug trafficking and illegal circulation of drugs, the inflow of hard drugs like opium, heroin and hashish from Afghanistan is increasing. Official estimates reveal that the police registered more than double the number of drug-related crimes in 1999 and 2000 than between 1995 to 1998. The chief prosecutor of western Kharazm region, where drug-associated crimes are rising despite measures taken by the law-enforcement agencies, thought that the real figure of drug-related crimes was higher. An increasing number of women and young unemployed people are getting involved in the drug trade. The prosecutor also admitted that five police officers had been arrested in 2000 for involvement in narcotics trafficking. According to the Human Development Report for the year 2000, the highest rates of drug use are found in the Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Navoiy regions in addition to the above-mentioned Kharazm region.⁸¹

There were around 200,000 drug abusers among in Uzbekistan in 2000, according to most observers, but the problem is growing. Registered addicts are subject to compulsory treatment in accordance with a new law on narcotics substances and psychotropic agents that took effect in January 2000, but otherwise little is being done to prevent the spread of abuse and rehabilitate the users. The political will to fight the combined drug issue is high, but hampered by a lack of resources. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan has taken a leading regional initiative in the fight against the illegal drug trade. According to the State Commission on Drug Control, the law enforcement agencies seized 1.5 metric tons of opium and 450 kilograms of heroin in the first nine months of 2000, which was largely a result of the stepped up record of the Customs Service.⁸²

Conclusions

Uzbekistan is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in Central Asia, but the role and treatment of the ethnic Tadjiks have been a troubling issue that could become intensified both internally in Uzbekistan and in relation to Tadjikistan. Uzbekistan is also traditionally one of the most devoted Islamic countries in the region. This has caused many Russians to feel alienated and leave the country. Furthermore, as the regime of Islam Karimov is considered as quite secular, frictions have occurred between the regime and more orthodox Muslims in Uzbekistan. In addition, a number of radical Islamic groups that want to

⁸¹ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.25 and Uzbek Television first channel: "Uzbek anti-drugs official says Central Asian drug trafficking increasing", 24 June 2001 in *BBC Monitoring Global Newslines – Central Asia Political*, 25 June 2001, from BBC Monitoring topic@mon.bbc.co.uk.

⁸² NATO Partnership for Peace Documentation Center *Europe and Central Asia*, downloaded from the Internet 19 October 2001 on www.isn.ethz.ch/pfdpdc/e_index.htm.

overthrow the present regime have emerged. The authorities have persecuted these groups fiercely, pressuring them towards increasing radicalisation since they have no legal space to work in.

The prospects for a dialogue between the government and the so-called extremist groups, who form the main opposition towards the present regime, are very limited and there is a clear risk that the internal tensions in Uzbekistan will intensify, especially in the ethnically complex and religiously devote Ferghana valley. This fear and the risk of increased internal tensions is intensified by the fact that the authorities have arrested not only extremists but also many ordinary citizens and Muslims. The International Crisis Group writes in an evaluation of the situation in Uzbekistan in 2001, that it is still possible to see a difference between militant groups, such as the IMU, and non-militant underground movements, represented primarily by the Hizb-ut-Tahrir. However, they fear that due to the state repression and worsening socio-economic conditions, this might soon not be the case.⁸³

There is consequently a well-founded fear that the radical extremism will spread also to other parts of the country. However, since the Ferghana valley is the least developed and poorest part of Uzbekistan with a relatively high rate of unemployment it should come as no surprise that the strongest support of radical groups are found here. If the socio-economic conditions get worse in other parts of the country, the risk that the so-called extremist tendencies will spread to these areas increases. The illegal drug trade is also likely to continue against the same background, but there are indicators that the stepped-up border control has given some results in this respect.

⁸³ ICG (2001) *Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report No.21, Osh/Brussels 21 August, downloaded from the Internet 12 November 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=393>, p.15.

Turkmenistan

Figure 9. Regional differences



- The south of Turkmenistan has a high concentration of Muslims and increasing activities of Islamic radicals influenced by the neighbouring Central Asian countries.
- In the north of Turkmenistan, illegal activities of radical organisations have occurred.
- Sunni Islam dominates the main part of the country.

Introduction

The obligation to be loyal to your clan regardless of your own opinion is an essential element inherent in the traditional clan structure that still plays an important role in Turkmenistan. This tradition has been put forward as one of the reasons for the continuing relative support of President Saparmurat Niyazov and an explanation for the lack of overt opposition against the present regime.⁸⁴ Another explanation is the implementation of a quite efficient socio-

⁸⁴ Swiecicka, Elzbieta (1996) "Turkmenistan i förvandling" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.110.

economic reform programme. Regardless of the level of support from the population, Niyazov keeps the country under a strict autocratic rule that leaves no room for opposition. As a consequence, the information coming both officially from Turkmenistan and from the independent sources that manage to escape the close monitoring is very sparse.

Turkmenistan is the country that has maintained the closest connections with the Taliban regime of all the Central Asian countries, which has made the country less exposed to many of the threats facing the other countries who haven chosen to support the Northern Alliance at the expense of the Taliban. In contrast to the other Central Asian countries, Turkmenistan has increased its economic ties with the Taliban regime over the last years and ha provided electricity and energy supplies to the Taliban controlled part of Afghanistan. However, Turkmenistan has also maintained quite good contacts with the Northern Alliance and Niyazov does not support the religious-political form of Taliban regime, but has maintained close links with the both rivalling forces in Afghanistan for economic reasons. Turkmenistan has been declared a permanently neutral country by the UN and, as the country would profit most from peace in Afghanistan, the country has tried to bring the Northern Alliance and the Taliban together for peace negotiations.⁸⁵

A Few Words on Military Capacity

Turkmenistan has not stated the numbers in their military forces officially and the figures that are nevertheless reported vary widely. The armed forces in Turkmenistan had approximately 17,500 actives of which the bulk of about 14,500 served in the army and 3,000 served in the air forces and air defence in the beginning of the 1990s. During the last years, however, the size of the border guards has become quite considerable and the borders of the country are generally relatively well protected. Turkmenistan has announced an intention to form a navy or coast guard in the close future. At present, the Russian Federation Caspian Sea Flotilla is operating as a joint Russian, Kazakh and Turkmen flotilla in the Caspian Sea under a Russian command based in Astrakhan.⁸⁶ According to CIA figures, 3.4 per cent of the Turkmen GDP was spent on military expenditures in 1999.⁸⁷

Socio-Economic Factors

Turkmenistan has preferred to develop bilateral economic contacts with the other post-Soviet states in order to solve the country's economic dependency and be able to negotiate directly with Russia on economic issues and with its energy customers about prices and supplies. Before alternative transport routes had been built, Turkmenistan was totally dependent on the Russian-controlled former Soviet pipelines in order to supply the country's vast energy

⁸⁵ Compare with ICG (2001) *Central Asian Perspectives on 11 September and the Afghan Crisis*, Central Asia Briefing, Osh/Brussels 28 September, downloaded from the Internet 2 October 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=439> and Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 18 January, downloaded from the Internet 1 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011801.shtml>.

⁸⁶ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2001) *The Military Balance 2001/2002*, London, Oxford University Press, p.170-171.

⁸⁷ CIA (2000) *The World Factbook 2000. Turkmenistan*. (online), downloaded from the Internet 10 March 2001 on <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

resources to countries abroad. As a consequence, the country had limited possibilities to sell to hard currency markets in Eastern and Western Europe, but had to concentrate on the other post-Soviet states, which often have had difficulties in paying during their time of independence. A drastic drop in production followed for Turkmenistan with subsequent economic decline and serious socio-economic crisis. In 1997, a gas pipeline was built to Iran for future access to the Turkish market, but it has only provided minor help. Despite the country's plentiful resources, Turkmenistan has thus been one of the largest economic losers during the post-Soviet period.⁸⁸

The recession during the first two years of independence was not as deep in Turkmenistan as it was in the other post-Soviet states, but in 1994-1996 the consequences of the breakdown in the inter-republican economic links and the problems with mutual payments worsened and accelerated the fall in industry production. Especially the recession in the gas industry meant serious economic problems for the economy that have not yet been fully solved. Also the cotton production, that is the second most important branch of the economy, is facing difficulties. In the consumer market, the amount of goods turnover has decreased at the same time as the prices of goods and services has increased at a rate faster than the growth of the incomes. The standards of living are consequently low for the majority of the population and the differences in income level and social status have grown. This is one factor that could pose a potential challenge to the authorities if they fail to stabilise the social situation.⁸⁹ According to the EBRD figure for 1999, 49 per cent of the Turkmen population were estimated to live in poverty and the actual level of unemployment was estimated to about 20 per cent, although there is no officially acknowledged unemployment and consequently no unemployment benefits either.⁹⁰

In response to the economic recession the government launched a reform programme at the end of 1992 called "Ten Years of Welfare" that aimed to improve standards of living and welfare.⁹¹ The proclaimed goal was to solve the country's economic and social problems until 2002. The programme included promises of free electricity, gas and water to all citizens and later bread was also included. This measure is one likely reason for the strong support President Niyazov enjoys in the country.⁹² The reforms have had some success and the relative economic isolation from Russia (in comparison with the other Central Asian states) helped the country avoid the consequences of the Russian financial crisis in August 1998 that affected most of the CIS economies. According to one Russian researcher the continued success of the reforms will depend on the consistency in the implementation of the reforms,

88 Spruyt, Hendrick & Ruseckas, Laurent (1999) "Economics and Energy in the South" in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.99; Zubarevich, Natalia V. & Fedorov, Yuri E. (1999) "Russian-Southern Economic Interaction" in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.124 and Webber, Mark (1997) *CIS Integration Trends. Russia and the Former Soviet South*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, p.33.

⁸⁹ Dudarev, K.P. (2001) "A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.155 and Kalnichenko, L.N. & Semenova, N.N. (2001) "The Economy of Kazakhstan" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.158-162.

⁹⁰ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1999) *Transition Report 1999. Ten Years of Transition*, London, EBRD, pp.275-276.

⁹¹ L.N. Kalnichenko & N.N. Semenova: "The Development of the Economy in the 1990s" in Alexei Vassiliev (ed.), *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, Saqi Books, London, 2001, p.162.

⁹² *Turkmenistan. Länder i fickformat*, nr.916 (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, p.15.

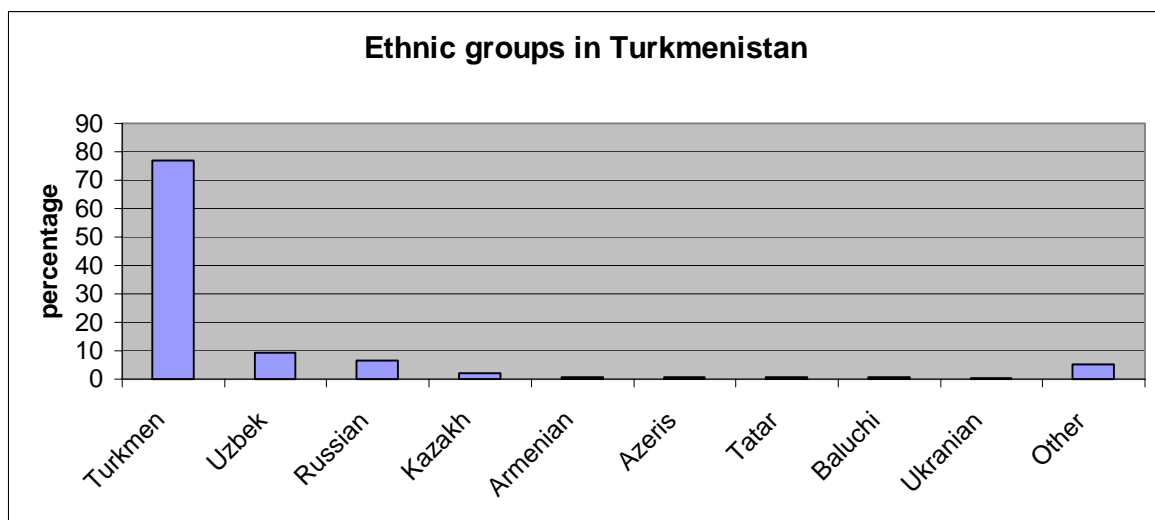
on the ability to make balanced decisions and on genuine attempts to fight the corruption in the country. In the absence of full statistical data for 1997-1998 he also deemed it difficult to make a reliable judgement of the social consequences of the reforms even though he saw positive signs in their previous gradual implementation.⁹³

Ethnically Related Threats

The ethnic composition of Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is ethnically a relatively homogenous country in the Central Asian region. The titular population makes up 77 per cent of the total population in Turkmenistan and the Uzbeks constitute the largest minority group with 9.2 per cent of the entire population. There is also a group of Russians in Turkmenistan comprising 6.7 per cent of the total population and a small group of Kazakhs comprising 2 per cent. None of the other minority groups constitute more than one per cent of the population in Turkmenistan. More than half of the population in Turkmenistan or approximately 2.6 million people live in rural areas and slightly more than two million live in urban areas. The Muslim belief is dominant among the Turkmen, Uzbek, Kazakh and the small Azeri and Tatar groups in the country.⁹⁴ The population in Turkmenistan was estimated to slightly more than 4.5 million people in mid-2000.⁹⁵

Figure 10. Ethnic groups in Turkmenistan



Even though the Russian minority in Turkmenistan was comparatively small in relation to the minorities in the other Central Asian states, they still contributed to 95 per cent of the republic's budget because of their employment in the oil and gas industry. The authoritarian

⁹³ L.N. Kalnichenko & N.N. Semenova: "The Development of the Economy in the 1990s" in Alexei Vassiliev (ed.), *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, Saqi Books, London, 2001, pp.171-172.

⁹⁴ *Human Rights and Democratisation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan* (2000), Washington, OSCE; King, J., Noble, J. & Humphreys, A. (1998) *Central Asia. A Lonely Planet Survival Kit*, Hawthorn, Lonely Planet Publication and *Population of the Republic of Turkmenistan* (1999) Statistical Yearbook, Ashkhabad.

⁹⁵ CIA (2000) *The World Factbook 2000. Turkmenistan*. (online), downloaded from the Internet 10 March 2001 on <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tx.html>.

regime of President Saparmurat Niyazov has prohibited the Russian specialists that dominate the high-technology sectors to leave. In addition, the regime has introduced a ban on the selling of dwellings and restricted the exportation of property for the ethnic Russians. The main reasons for why the Russians in Turkmenistan have attempted to leave have been the hard social and economic conditions. Because of the rationing system, shortage of foodstuffs and, not least important, lack of contacts with the countryside for obtaining additional food, the Russians have found themselves in an even worse situation than the ethnic Turkmen.⁹⁶

The constitution proclaims that the state language of the country is Turkmen. The status of the Russian language was not fixed in the constitution and it was envisaged that Turkmen would take over as the language of the workplaces by 1996. Furthermore, the Roman script is introduced in Turkmenistan and will be used in the workplaces from 2001. This promotion of the Turkmen language is a major problem for the Russian-speaking population of which less than five per cent are fluent in Turkmen. The leadership explains the reduction in the use of the Russian language by the steady decrease of Russians in Turkmenistan as a consequence of both emigration and the higher birth rates among the ethnic Turkmen.⁹⁷

The leadership has been aware of the need to ensure the social protection of the Russian-speaking population who are a vital asset in the industry, dominating for example in the gas industry that yields about 75 per cent of the budget proceeds. The economic weight of the Russian-speaking population does not, however, correspond to their political status even though their share among the decision-makers has been higher than in the other Central Asian states. There has been a rapid “Turkmenisation” of the leadership after independence, but Russian managers still persist in industry and especially in the science-intensive enterprises. Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian country that has declared in its constitution that the head of state must be representative of the indigenous *ethnos*.⁹⁸ The constitution also postulates that “true Turkmen” should have first access to rights of ownership and employment, probably implying that Russians but also Turkmen abroad would come second in case of disputes.⁹⁹

In May 1992 there was an attempt to set up a Russian Community in Turkmenistan in order to protect the interests of the Russian-speaking population, but the authorities stopped the attempt. According to the president, such a step ran counter to the constitution of the country. It is not, however, the ethnic Russians or Russian-speaking part of the population that has suffered most in terms of discrimination, but the small groups of Armenians and Azerbaijanis. They only constitute around one per cent each of the total population, but are the only non-indigenous groups that are increasing.¹⁰⁰ The Uzbek minority that lives along the Amu-Darja River in the northeast of the country bordering on Uzbekistan and the Kazakhs living close to the Turkmen-Kazakh border can travel freely across the borders. Moreover, Turkmenistan has bilateral agreements with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on mutual education in minority

⁹⁶ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) “Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., pp.236-237.

⁹⁷ Dudarev, K.P. (2001) “A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime” in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.142-143.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.143.

⁹⁹ Swiecicka, Elzbieta (1996) “Turkmenistan i förvandling” in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.113.

¹⁰⁰ Dudarev, K.P. (2001) “A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime” in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.144.

languages and free choice of where to study, which enables parents in Turkmenistan to send their children to higher education in these two countries. This can probably serve to reduce inter-ethnic tensions.¹⁰¹

On average, the inter-ethnic relations in Turkmenistan have remained relatively calm, which is largely due to the fact that tribal identification plays a much more important role in the Turkmen society than ethnic identification. The small percentage of the non-Turkmen population and their lack of political influence keeps the nationalist tendencies weak and the president's declarations on positive attitudes towards the Russian-speaking population have also helped to maintain the inter-ethnic peace. In the words of Niyazov, the thousands of Russians and Ukrainians living in Turkmenistan are citizens of the country just like the indigenous Turkmen are and they are one of the reasons why there will always be a connecting bridge between Turkmenistan and these countries. Consequently, instigation of inter-ethnic hatred is one of the gravest crimes in Turkmenistan.¹⁰²

Migration

There was an increase in migration of the Russian speaking population during the early years of independence even though Turkmenistan has been relatively stable and peaceful. Seven per cent of the Russian-speaking population left Turkmenistan in 1989 to 1991, but three per cent did so in 1993 alone. This happened despite the law granting citizenship in Turkmenistan to all people living on the country's territory on the day the law was adopted. There was however a simultaneous growth in anti-Russian attitudes among the indigenous population that was reflected even in the official press. The growth of "Turkmenisation" and the increasing importance of the role of Islam are further reasons why the Russians have felt uncomfortable in everyday life.¹⁰³

After Turkmenistan and Russia signed an agreement on dual citizenship in late 1993, in addition to agreements concerning other questions of migration and the protection of migrant's rights, the migration of the Russian-speaking population has nevertheless virtually stopped. In a May 1995 meeting, Niyazov and his Russian counterpart reconfirmed this resolution by signing the agreements. These documents were unprecedented in Russia's relations with the former Soviet states and are very important for both countries. It remains however to be seen how the official agreements will be implemented. According to a Russian researcher, the Turkmen government has not always fulfilled its obligations.¹⁰⁴

The local level and the importance of informal politics

Tribes still play an important role in the Turkmen society and tribal antagonism could become a major challenge to the present regime. The three largest tribes in present-day Turkmenistan are the *tekke* from the centre of Turkmenistan around the town Mary, *ersary* living along the Afghan border and *jomud* from the area adjacent to the Caspian Sea. Even if these tribes have become increasingly mixed over the years reports have claimed that the opposition between the tribes have grown after independence. President Niyazov is a member of the *tekke* tribe,

¹⁰¹ Swiecicka, Elzbieta (1996) "Turkmenistan i förvandling" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.111.

¹⁰² Dudarev, K.P. (2001) "A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.144-155.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp.143-144.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.149-150.

and political opponents to Niyazov from the other main tribes claim that he and his supporters come from a weak tribe that came to power only with the help from the Russians in Moscow.¹⁰⁵ There is consequently a growing discontent among the politically disadvantaged tribes growing under the tightly monitored political surface that could become explosive if the present regime was weakened.

Religiously Related Threats

The religious composition of the population in Turkmenistan

The vast majority of the population in Turkmenistan, 89 per cent, is Sunni Muslim. The Azeris who reside in Turkmenistan (0.8 per cent of the population) are Shiah Muslims. There is no reliable statistical information about the religious affiliation for the different ethnic groups in Turkmenistan, but the ethnic Turkmens, Uzbeks and Kazakhs are nominally Muslims. According to some unofficial sources, Shiism is gaining wider support in the country.¹⁰⁶ There are also around six per cent orthodox Christians in Turkmenistan.¹⁰⁷ The possibilities to register religious organisations are severely restricted in Turkmenistan. In 1997, all religious organisations were barred from official registration except for Muslim communities aligned with the Sunni Muslim Board and the Russian orthodox communities in Ourkmenistan under new amendments to the religion law.¹⁰⁸

Islamic traditions have an important influence on the social and cultural life of the society in Turkmenistan. It does not have much influence on the political life, however, which is controlled by the strict authoritarian regime under the leadership President Saparmurat Niyazov. The religious organisations in Turkmenistan do not bear any state functions, but the state nevertheless promotes Islamic religious activities up to a certain limit as part of the national history and culture.¹⁰⁹ There are also unofficial, self-appointed, priests working in the country and according to some information the Sufi brotherhoods and the unofficial Sufi mysticism, which has played an important role in the traditional spiritual life of the Turkmens, have also survived the communist era.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Swiecicka, Elzbieta (1992) "Turkmenistan" in Gustavsson, Sven & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Gamla folk och nya stater. Det upplösta sovjetimperiet*, Stockholm, Gidlunds förlag, p.374 and Swiecicka, Elzbieta (1996) "Turkmenistan i förvandling" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, pp.110-111.

¹⁰⁶ Bartold, V. (1998) *Muslim World: Studies of Islamic History*, Moscow; *Human Rights and Democratisation in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan* (2000), Washington, OSCE; Robinson, Francis (ed.) (1999) *Islamic World*, Britain, Cambridge Illustrated History; "Islam in Central Asia", *Islam Aleme*, 9 October 1999; Luzanova, E.: "Islam in Central Asia", *The Central Asia Post*, Almaty, 23 January 1997; A. Malashenko: "Islam and Policy in the Central Asian States", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No.4, May 1999 and Ponomarev, V. (2000) *Turkmenistan: Turkmen Power and Islam*, 3 April, Central Asia, Human Rights Information Centre "Memorial".

¹⁰⁷ *Turkmenistan*. Länder i fickformat, nr.916 (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, p.5.

¹⁰⁸ Corley, Felix (2001) "Turkmenistan crushes religious minorities", *Eurasianet.org* 25 January, downloaded from the Internet 11 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/resources/turkmenistan/hypermail/200101/0022.html>.

¹⁰⁹ *News Brief from and about Turkmenistan* (2000), 14-20 May, downloaded from the Internet on <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/re/news/>; Ponomarev, V. (2000) *Turkmenistan: Turkmen Power and Islam*, 3 April, Central Asia, Human Rights Information Centre "Memorial"; "Turkmenistan Reaches Power-Sharing Agreement with Factions in Afghanistan" (1999), *News and Trends in Central Asia*, Vol.4, No.7, 6 April and Whittell, G. (1998) *Central Asia*, London.

¹¹⁰ Swiecicka, Elzbieta (1996) "Turkmenistan i förvandling" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.114.

According to the constitution from 1992, Turkmenistan is a secular state with proclaimed freedom of conscience and any citizen is free to profess any religion. President Niyazov declared at his presidential inauguration that Turkmenistan would not base its policy on either Communism or Islam. The state has however provided financial aid for the restoration and construction of Mosques in recent years and study of the history of Islam and the Koran has become a school subject on the president's request. The latter decision is rumoured to be a result of pressure from abroad, for example from Saudi Arabia that has financed constructions of mosques and *medresehs* and promoted the strengthening of Islam in Turkmenistan as a way to spread the religion's influence.¹¹¹

The constitution states that, in the same way as the religious organisations shall be separate from the state and not interfere in state affairs, the state must not interfere in religious activities either. Despite this, the Turkmen clergy has approved of formulations that are obligatory to all believers in Turkmenistan that means that the traditional prayer must begin with wishes of success for Turkmenbashi and end with a vow of loyalty to the fatherland and president.¹¹² Turkmenbashi – leader of the Turkmens – is a title the president, who wishes to be seen as the father of his countrymen and protector of those who suffer, has given himself.¹¹³ The president has described the elevation of himself, which has reached proportions of a personality cult and which apparently also has become intermixed with the Islamic faith, as necessary for the state since people need something to believe in. The Turkmen people has, according to Niyazov, always worshipped something – first fire, then Islam, then Marx – and today, when there is an absence of strong state structures, it is necessary that there is a leader who can consolidate society.¹¹⁴ At the same time the president can thus use the (Islamic) religion in order to consolidate his own position.

Radical Islam in Turkmenistan

The Turkmen President Niyazov claims that Muslim extremism poses no threat to his country and it is impossible to find official information about the activities of any extremist religious organisation operating in Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is considered as a politically closed country in comparison with the other Central Asian countries and all the attempts of extremists to develop their activities and ideology on Turkmen ground have been quenched by the authoritarian regime. It is nonetheless not inconceivable that there exist connections to and influence from some of the religiously extremist and fundamentalist organisations from Afghanistan, Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan in the Turkmen country.¹¹⁵ In the short perspective, Turkmenistan is probably less exposed to radical Islamic forces than the other Central Asian countries with the strong authoritarian regime as a main reason. However, if the present regime is weakened, this situation could change quickly.

¹¹¹ Dudarev, K.P. (2001) "A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.141-153.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.

¹¹³ *Turkmenistan*. Länder i fickformat, nr.916 (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, p.15.

¹¹⁴ Dudarev, K.P. (2001) "A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.136-137.

¹¹⁵ Burkhanov, K.N. (2000) *Extremism in Central Asia*, Almaty, Agance France Press; *Human Rights and Democratization in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan* (2000), Washington, OSCE; Ponomarev, V. (2000) *The Political Future of Islam in Turkmenistan*, Washington, OSCE; Rashid, Ahmed (1999): "Exporting Extremism", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, downloaded from the Internet on <http://www.rferl.org/bd/tu/reports/2000/05/200500.html> and *Washington File*, downloaded from the Internet on <http://www.usembassy.ro/USIS/Washington-File>.

The leaders of Turkmenistan have rejected accusations from the mass media about the “Islamisation” of the Turkmen society that may result in the country’s turn “southwards”, emphasising that the return to Islam is part of the national culture, but that it does not mean a dogmatic form of worship. According to Niyazov, the Turkmen were never a fanatically religious people and Christianity enjoys the same rights as Islam in Turkmenistan, the only difference is that most of the population is Muslim. The *imam* of the largest mosque in Ashgabat, who is a prominent clergyman, confirms the lack of strong religious adherence in present-day Turkmenistan, but believes that this situation will change. The imam describes the younger generation as amoral atheists as a result of the communist era and that Islam today need not only fill the vacuum left by the disappearance of communism, but also morally upgrade and strengthen the Turkmen society. He is convinced that religious Islamic regimes will come to power in Central Asia after one or two generations.¹¹⁶

Even though Tadjikistan has felt the threat from Afghanistan most keenly, the other Central Asian states early agreed that it was necessary to try to control the unstable situation in Tadjikistan in order to prevent the continued spread of Islamic fundamentalism from Afghanistan. Initially, at least, Turkmenistan did not emphasis this threat towards the region as strongly as the other Central Asian states did, but the country has not opposed the peacekeeping efforts in Tadjikistan either.¹¹⁷ In October 2000 the country adopted a joint declaration with the other Central Asian states as a result of an international conference on strengthening security and stability in Central Asia in which the states pledged to have a joint approach in the fight against drugs, organised crime and terrorism.¹¹⁸ This was probably as far as Niyazov was prepared to go in terms of formulations of threats. Niyazov would not have agreed to sign any document indicating that there are religious extremists operating in or posing a threat to his country.

During the summer 2001, President Niyazov instructed the Council for Religious Affairs to sort out the issue of “unreasoned expansion” of the network of religious schools in the country, especially in some districts in the northern Dashoguz region near the Uzbek border. The president emphasised that religion is separate from the state in Turkmenistan and that the regime has nothing against spiritual education in principle, but that the network of religious schools must be investigated since it had spread so quickly and without an obvious need for more religious schools.¹¹⁹ Measures like this shows both how the regime keeps a thorough control of the religious activity in the country and that the authorities are concerned that the religious extremist activities will spread from the other Central Asian countries and Afghanistan to Turkmenistan despite the claims that there are no religious extremist organisations in the country.

¹¹⁶ Dudarev, K.P. (2001) “A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime” in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.142.

¹¹⁷ d’Anieri, Paul (1997) “International Cooperation among Unequal Partners: the Emergence of Bilateralism in the Former Soviet Union”, *International Politics. A Journal of Transnational Issues and Global Problems*, Vol.34, No.4, December, p.428.

¹¹⁸ Narodnoye Slovo: “Text of declaration adopted by Uzbek forum on security in Central Asia”, 24 October 2000 in *BBC SWB SU/3982 G/1*, 27 October 2000.

¹¹⁹ Turkmenistan.RU Internet newspaper web site: “Turkmen leader slams religious schools’ mushrooming in north”, 27 June 2001 in *BBC Monitoring Global Newslines – Central Asia Political*, 28 June 2001, from BBC Monitoring topic@mon.bbc.co.uk.

Economically Related Threats

Illegal trade

Turkmenistan has a long-lasting tradition of drug consumption and is today an important link in the drug-traffic route from Asia to Europe. The drugs used in Turkmenistan are either grown in the country or imported from Afghanistan and Iran. During the last years there has been a dramatic increase in opium-poppy plantations on irrigated land in the Karakum desert. From having been merely a purveyor of semi-finished narcotic products, the processing of drugs is today increasing in Turkmenistan.¹²⁰ The trafficking of drugs has been acknowledged as a threat towards the security of Turkmenistan. In the summer 2000, President Niyazov announced that Turkmenistan needed to step up its control of the southern border with Uzbekistan because of its proximity to Tadjikistan that has become a major stop on the narcotics trafficking routes. The country would consequently establish more border posts and send additional guards to the Uzbek-Turkmen border.¹²¹

The authorities have so far concentrated their efforts, in the form of both resources and manpower, on the fight against the flow of drugs from Afghanistan and the border with Iran is also relatively well guarded. This has produced a mixed result. On the one hand, the quantity of narcotics substances as well as the number of seizures intercepted along the Turkmen-Afghan border had reduced considerably in 2000 compared to the previous years. On the other hand, the border with Uzbekistan remains almost unguarded since all resources are being used along the Afghan, and to a lesser extent, the Iranian borders. Consequently, the illegal trade of drugs across the Turkmen-Uzbek border has increased. According to the Turkmen Ministry of Health, there are six to seven per cent drug addicts among the population in Turkmenistan. Unofficial figures put the figures slightly higher, at eight to nine per cent.¹²²

One of the few influential forces that have been viewed as a threat to the stability of Saparmurat Niyazov's regime by several observers is the trade mafia, which reportedly also disturbs the president. In September 1997 the chairman of the National Security Committee admitted in an interview to newspaper *Neutralnyi Turkmenistan* that a consolidation of mafia structures and corrupt elements did exist in Turkmenistan that had managed to use the difficulties of the transitional period to gain vast profits. Of special concern is the economic smuggling that has spread during the last years. Some groups have been able to use direct contacts with foreign partners in order to illegally export valuable raw materials from Turkmenistan, such as cotton fibre, motor oil, gas condensate, alcohol, gold and silver, mercury and ferrous metals.¹²³

Conclusions

¹²⁰ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) "Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South" in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., pp.229-230.

¹²¹ RFE/RL Turkmen Service (2000) *Turkmenistan to Strengthen Borders with CIS neighbours*, 16 June, downloaded from the Internet 4 October 2001 on <http://www.rferl.org/bd/tu/reports/index.html>.

¹²² NATO Partnership for Peace Documentation Center *Europe and Central Asia*, downloaded from the Internet 19 October 2001 on www.isn.ethz.ch/pfdpdc/e_index.htm.

¹²³ Dudarev, K.P. (2001) "A Post-Communist Authoritarian Regime" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.154-155.

The strict authoritarian regime in Turkmenistan keeps a close lid on both potential ethnic and religious conflicts and the information emanating from the country about these issues is scarce. The possibilities for inter-ethnic strife or religiously based conflicts must however for the time being be deemed as low due to the low level of non-indigenous citizens in Turkmenistan and the stable position of Sunni Islam. Due to the strong repression from the government it is however probable that tensions are growing beneath the surface that could erupt quickly if the regime would suddenly show signs of weakness. As for now, there are no reports about any unofficial religious or ethnic groups operating in the country and authorities maintain that no extremist or terrorist groups exist on their territory. Despite their affirmations, there have been some signs that the regime might be worried that extremist tendencies might spread to Turkmenistan, which indicates that they are not so sure how long the present calm will last.

The government's treatment of the minorities has been aimed to decrease potential tensions, which the agreement of dual citizenship with Russia is a particularly striking example of. Even if the Russian minority has lost much of its previous political leverage and social status, they maintain an important economic power and will continue to do so during a long time to come – something that the authorities are well aware of. Specialists within some key sectors have been forbidden to leave the country. The threats against the stability of the present regime in Turkmenistan are largely connected to economic issues. The maintenance of calm in Turkmenistan is probably dependent on how the authorities manage to handle the socio-economic situation in the country. The latter also has consequences for the illegal drug trade that continues to flow relatively free across the Turkmen-Uzbek border. The trade mafia and the growing discontent among the disadvantaged tribes, that have lost economic influence as well as political due to the close connection between politics and economics in the Central Asian societies, are two other internal threats that the Turkmen authorities need to monitor closely in order to maintain the present calm.

Kazakhstan

Figure 11. Regional differences



- The most devote (Sunni Muslim) part of the population, although the Sunni Islam is not so orthodox and mixed with pre-Islamic practices.
- Spread of Sufism.
- Dominated by Sunni Islam.

Introduction

Kazakhstan, the largest of the five Central Asian states, is emerging as one of the most stable countries in the region and is furthest removed from the threats facing the region from the south. As in the other Central Asian states, however, this stability has also implied an increasingly authoritarian state. President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has ruled the country since it became independent in December 1991, was made head of state in the Kazakh Republic already in June 1989 and was then seen as a moderate authoritarian ruler who initiated a change towards gradual economic and political reforms. This has changed over the years. The increased authoritarian measures have led to a growing political opposition to the regime and there have been public charges of large-scale corruption brought against the president and his family. In 2000, the parliament declared the president an honoured citizen

for life, unaccountable to any future courts or authorities, which is not far from being appointed President for life. The most pressing problem for Kazakhstan regarding the questions dealt with in this report has been the issue of the large majority of Russians living in the north of the country. Elements of this minority have continued to agitate for separation from Kazakhstan and they have also forced Kazakhstan to maintain close cooperation with Russia. The ethnic Uighur minority living close to the Chinese border is another sensitive issue in relation to the country's other large and powerful neighbour.¹²⁴

A Few Words on Military Capability

Kazakhstan's total armed forces number around 64,000 men. 45,000 of these serve in the army and Kazakhstan also has an air force with 19,000 men (including in the air defence). There are 34,500 people serving in the paramilitary forces, including an estimated 12,000 in the border defence and 20,000 in the internal security troops.¹²⁵ As a consequence of the IMU incursions into the Central Asian region in 1999 that have attracted international attention, the United States offered an aid package to Kazakhstan for the training and equipment of counter-terrorist and anti-drug units. China has also offered an aid programme worth approximately USD 1.3 million to help equip the armed forces of Kazakhstan.¹²⁶ The U.S. package is worth four million U.S. dollars. In addition, Russia will donate arms worth about USD 20 million to help improve the border security, which lies very much in Russia's own interest. Kazakhstan doubled its official defence budget in 2000, which is now around one per cent of GDP, but if factors hidden under the heading of public order and security are also taken into account, the actual figure is closer to two per cent of GDP.¹²⁷

Socio-Economic Factors

Despite the fact that Kazakhstan is a resource rich country that originally could hope to develop a strong and independent economy, the continued dependency on Russia has been strong. Even though Kazakhstan has had some success in attracting foreign investments and with the reforms towards market economy, the economy is still heavily influenced and restricted by two factors. The first is the economic decline following from the break-up of the Soviet market. The second is the fact that the development and export of the oil and natural gas resources, that are the most important sources for potential improvement of the economy,

¹²⁴ Compare with ICG (2001) *Central Asian Perspectives on 11 September and the Afghan Crisis*, Central Asia Briefing, Osh/Brussels 28 September, downloaded from the Internet 2 October 2001 on <http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/showreport.cfm?reportid=439>, Petrov, N.I. & Gafarly, M.S. (2001) "The Course Towards Political Stability" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.31-32 and Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 18 January, downloaded from the Internet 1 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011801.shtml>.

¹²⁵ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2001) *The Military Balance 2001/2002*, London, Oxford University Press, p.165.

¹²⁶ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2000) *The Military Balance 2000/2001*, London, Oxford University Press, p.159.

¹²⁷ The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (2001) *The Military Balance 2001/2002*, London, Oxford University Press, p.157.

are totally dependent on Russia, since the major pipelines and ports are on Russian territory.¹²⁸

The economy in Kazakhstan has slumped heavily during the years of independence, as it has in the other Central Asian countries, even though the recession in production and investment had slowed down during the latter part of the 1990s and there have been minor improvements in some economic indices. These improvements, however, were largely upset by the Russian economic crisis in 1998. By 1996, the GDP was down to 31 per cent of the level in 1991 and corresponded to the level of the early 1980s. After independence was proclaimed Kazakhstan formulated a plan for a so-called social market economy, in which privatisation originally played an important role. In time, however, the president was forced to admit that the progress during the first stage of privatisation was far from satisfactory and that a major reason for this failure was that the majority of the population had not played an active role in the reforms.¹²⁹

The oil and gas industry is the key to the country's economic development. During the year 2000, Kazakhstan continued to face problems in persuading foreign companies to build new pipelines for the export of these commodities. The government has pointed out that they will have to turn increasingly towards economic cooperation with Russia if Chinese and U.S. companies do not honour their commitments to build new pipelines. However, the Kazakh authorities have been reported to deny the Chinese companies the right to build a pipeline through Kazakhstan for environmental reasons. They have insisted that China should build a pipeline that connects to the Russian network complemented by a connection through Xienjiang and southeastern Siberia. Furthermore, many investors backed off from their operations in Kazakhstan because of the corruption scandals in the government and the demands for huge kickbacks from Kazakhstan. The discovery of a huge field of oil reserves at a field near the Caspian Sea gave rise to new hopes for future participation in the U.S.-sponsored oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey, but Nazarbayev did not make any commitments to that end. In addition, due to problems with the country's power grids, the country had to rely on imported Russian power from Siberia.¹³⁰

Despite these economic problems, the country had experienced a small economic growth during 1999 with one per cent, compared to a 2.5 per cent decline the previous year. In May 2000, the government announced that first quarter of the fiscal year 2000 showed a growth of GDP with seven per cent and an increased industrial production with 15 per cent. The gas production had risen with 32 per cent, the oil production was up by 16 per cent and, as a consequence, the government also announced its intentions to pay back an IMF loan to the amount of USD 400 million before the payment was due. In the same month, Kazakhstan received a loan worth USD 400 million from the Asian Development Bank.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Webber, Mark (1997) *CIS Integration Trends. Russia and the Former Soviet South*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, pp.26-28.

¹²⁹ Kalnichenko, L.N. & Semenova, N.N. (2001) "The Economy of Kazakhstan" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.58-70.

¹³⁰ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 18 January, downloaded from the Internet 1 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011801.shtml>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Standards of living and prospects for life improvement

The recession during the years of independence has caused hardships for the population as the government has had difficulties in paying out wages and pensions. In 1997, many (state) employees had not received their wages for two years. The growing inequalities in the country has given rise to dissatisfaction among the population who have seen people among the political elite and some criminals gaining large fortunes at the same time as the majority of the population suffers, especially in some of the rural areas. Only some ten per cent of the population are entitled to some form of state allowance.¹³² According to EBRD figures, half of the Kazakh population was estimated to live in poverty in 1999.¹³³ Two Russian researchers emphasise that it is important to note that nationality conflicts often are overshadowed by social problems in Kazakhstan. A serious example is constituted by the large-scale strikes the country witnessed in the mining industries in early summer 1992 that were especially difficult in the Karaganda region. The reform course chosen by the government has not had the full support of the population either.¹³⁴

The social problems have been aggravated during the period of reforms. Enormous increases in the consumer prices reduced the actual purchase capacity with three to four times and the average monthly salary was also depreciated. There are vast growing inequalities between the rich and the poor in Kazakhstan. In 1992, the gross income of the ten per cent richest people exceeded that of ten per cent of the poorest people with 8.5 times. Overall, the social differentiation has led to impoverishment for the majority of the population and there was a clear deterioration of the average material welfare of the Kazakh population during the first half of the 1990s. The government has continually been forced to revise the provisions of the reform laws in an attempt to take account of the actual situation. In April 1993, a Programme of Urgent Anti-Crisis Measures and Deepening of the Socio-Economic Reforms was approved of that, among a number of measures, gave priority to solving the problems of inflation and recession in production and to alleviating the worst consequences of the reforms for the most vulnerable citizens.¹³⁵ Most of the population will however continue to experience difficult socio-economic conditions for a long period to come.

Employment

Because of a policy of employment protection at state enterprises and the encouragement of the development of the private sector, the early economic reforms did not lead to a great rise in unemployment. However, between 1991 and 1996, the people registered as unemployed had risen with nearly 70 times and the unemployment rate reached 4.2 per cent in 1996. If those who did not register officially were taken into consideration as well, the figure was estimated to reach one million people or 15 per cent of the economically active population in the country. The government has not managed to fully solve the employment problems. After the financial crises in Russia in August 1998 and April 1999, the unemployment rate increased again. According to the Committee for Economic Planning of Kazakhstan at the

¹³² *Kazakstan, Länder i fickformat nr.913* (1999), Stockholm, Utrikespolitiska institutet, p.27-28.

¹³³ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1999) *Transition Report 1999. Ten Years of Transition*, London, EBRD, p.232.

¹³⁴ Petrov, N.I. & Gafarly, M.S. (2001) "The Course Towards Political Stability" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.36.

¹³⁵ Kalnichenko, L.N. & Semenova, N.N. (2001) "The Economy of Kazakhstan" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.65-70.

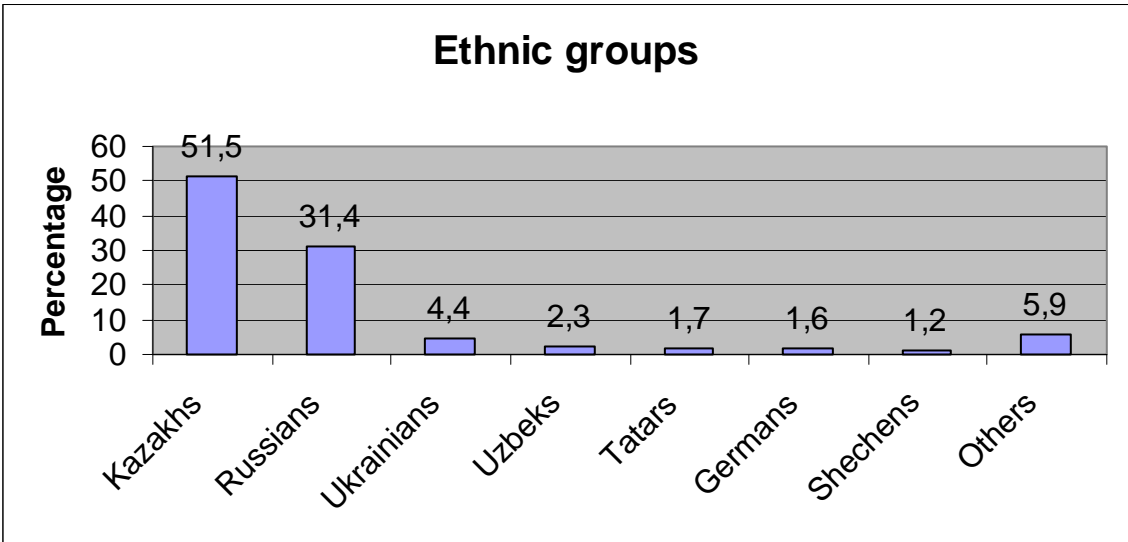
Ministry of Power, Industry and Trade, the actual unemployment level was estimated to around 9.3 per cent in 1990. The share of those who get unemployment allowances (of the total number of unemployed) increased from 38 per cent in 1993 to 68 per cent in 1997. The average size of the allowance is considerably higher in Kazakhstan than in the other CIS countries with the exception of Moldova, meaning that the incentive to register as unemployed probably is higher too. During the recent years there has been an increase in rural unemployment and in the mid-1990s, half of all those registered as unemployed lived in the countryside.¹³⁶

Ethnically Related Threats

The ethnic composition of Kazakhstan

The titular population of Kazakhstan comprises only 51 per cent of the country’s entire population¹³⁷ that was estimated at around 16.7 million in July 2000.¹³⁸ The largest minority group is the ethnic Russians comprising 31.4 per cent of the population according to local statistics. The Russian part of the population in Kazakhstan has been falling gradually during the ten years since the country gained independence in 1991. In 1998, 40 per cent of the Russians that used to live in Kazakhstan had emigrated from the country. However, approximately a third of these Russians have returned to Kazakhstan again, as will be further developed below. By contrast, the number of ethnic Kazakhs is increasing as Kazakhs that have been living abroad in, for example, the other former Soviet republics, China and a small number in Europe, return to Kazakhstan.¹³⁹

Figure 12. Ethnic groups in Kazakhstan



Population in Kazakhstan 1999: 15,6 Million.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.65-66.
¹³⁷ *Statistics about the Religious Situation in Kazakhstan* (2000) Almaty, Republic Agency of Statistics.
¹³⁸ CIA (2000) *The World Factbook 2000. Kazakhstan.* (online), downloaded from the Internet 10 March 2001 from [http:// www.odci.gov / cia / publications / factbook / geos / kz.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kz.html).
¹³⁹ *Statistics about the Religious Situation in Kazakhstan* (2000) Almaty, Republic Agency of Statistics.

The Kazakhs were the largest ethnic group in the 1989 census (39.7 per cent of the total population), but they did not form a majority. Moreover, they were outnumbered by the combined Slavic population of Russians, Belorussians and Ukrainians, who generally identified themselves as Russian speakers (jointly comprising 44.3 per cent of the total population). In 1897, the combined Slavic population in Kazakhstan comprised less than 13 per cent of the total population and the ethnic Kazakhs made up almost 74 per cent. As early as 1939, however, the Russians had become the largest ethnic group in Kazakhstan and formed a majority of the population together with the other Slavic nationalities.¹⁴⁰ This was the result of deportations of people to Kazakhstan and of reallocations of people in order to cover the demographic losses of the Kazakhs that starved to death or emigrated to avoid the famine that became a consequence of the enforced collectivisation-taking place in the early 1930s.¹⁴¹

In the northern parts of Kazakhstan adjacent to Russia around 80 per cent of the population have been Russians¹⁴² and, as is shown above, it is only during these last years that the Kazakhs have become a majority in their own republic. The close ties to Russia are also emphasised by the fact that approximately one million Kazakhs lived in Russia prior to Kazakhstan's independence.¹⁴³ The question of the ethnic composition in Kazakhstan has consequently become a both important and sensitive issue for independent Kazakhstan, especially concerning the regions dominated by Russians.

The change in the ethnic composition in favour of the titular nationality has thus been considered as a priority by the Kazakh leadership that associated this with the future of Kazakhstan as a unitary state at the same time as they feared the rise of separatist tendencies in the regions dominated by ethnic Russian population. The Kazakh population has grown in proportion to the other nationalities during the last decade as a result of the faster population growth of the Kazakhs and the Russian emigration. The "Kazakhisation" of the regions inhabited by Russians has taken various forms, with ethnic Kazakhs being appointed to administrative and executive posts and towns with old Russian names being renamed into Kazakh.¹⁴⁴ The change of the capital from the southern city Almaty to Astana in the Russian-inhabited northern region is also generally interpreted as an attempt to change the ethno-demographic and socio-political situation in this region in an effort to curb the Russian influence in the northern part of the republic.¹⁴⁵ A Russian researcher noted in 1996 that the previous years had seen an active repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs from Mongolia and China

¹⁴⁰ Alexandrov, Mikhail (1999) *Uneasy Alliance: Relations Between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era, 1992-1997*, Westport and London, Greenwood Press, p.24-310.

¹⁴¹ Svanberg, Ingvar (1996) "Kazakstan – ett nytt land mellan Europa och Asien" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, pp.23-44.

¹⁴² Suny, Ronald Grigor (1999) "Southern Tears: Dangerous Opportunities in the Caucasus and Central Asia" in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.168.

¹⁴³ Petrov, N.I. & Gafarly, M.S. (2001) "The Course Towards Political Stability" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.31.

¹⁴⁴ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) "Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South" in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., pp.238-239.

¹⁴⁵ Petrov, N.I. & Gafarly, M.S. (2001) "The Course Towards Political Stability" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, pp.31-32.

who had settled in the northern region and provided with housing left by emigrated Russians or Germans.¹⁴⁶

The Russians in Kazakhstan, who have been used to holding an influential position in the Kazakh society, have felt the growing pressure on them after the collapse of the Soviet Union most acutely. The recognition of the Kazakh language as the only official language in the country despite the fact that only one per cent of the Russian population were able to speak Kazakh in 1991 and the proclamation of Kazakhstan as the state of “a self-determined Kazakh nation” are examples of measures that stimulated the Russians to emigrate.¹⁴⁷ Despite these measures, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has wanted to establish Kazakhstan as both a homeland of Kazakhs, promoting the titular nationality, and simultaneously as a multinational state in which all inhabitants should have equal civil rights and opportunities. He has tried to suppress the more extreme nationalists and agreed to slow down the change towards the use of the Kazakh language.¹⁴⁸

Russian was recognised as an official language in the 1995 constitution as a reversal of the 1989 law that declared Kazakh as the only state language. The 1997 language law re-established Kazakh as the only state language and promoted the continued spread of the Kazakh language and successive transfer of administrative work into Kazakh. At the same time, however, Russian could still be used in official capacities for the time being. Furthermore, internal documentation in state and private organisations as well as all contracts between individuals and companies must be written in Kazakh as well as Russian.¹⁴⁹ There is still a part of the Russified and urban population that send their children to Russian schools as do nearly all non-Kazakhs, even though an influential part of the Kazakh population supports the relatively moderate nationalisation process.¹⁵⁰

In early 1994, the Siberian Cossacks living in northern Kazakhstan emerged as a new and well-organised force in the Kazakh-Russian discussions. They have been particularly sensitive to the Kazakhisation.¹⁵¹ Cossack political organisations had however been formed

¹⁴⁶ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) “Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.239. See also Petrov, N.I. & Gafarly, M.S. (2001) “The Course Towards Political Stability” in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.53.

¹⁴⁷ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) “Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.238.

¹⁴⁸ Suny, Ronald Grigor (1999) “Southern Tears: Dangerous Opportunities in the Caucasus and Central Asia” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.169. See also Svanberg, Ingvar (1996) “Kazakstan – ett nytt land mellan Europa och Asien” in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, pp.32-33.

¹⁴⁹ Alexandrov, Mikhail (1999) *Uneasy Alliance: Relations Between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era, 1992-1997*, Westport and London, Greenwood Press, pp.137-138 and Suny, Ronald Grigor (1999) “Southern Tears: Dangerous Opportunities in the Caucasus and Central Asia” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.169.

¹⁵⁰ Suny, Ronald Grigor (1999) “Southern Tears: Dangerous Opportunities in the Caucasus and Central Asia” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.169.

¹⁵¹ Petrov, N.I. & Gafarly, M.S. (2001) “The Course Towards Political Stability” in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.54.

already in 1990, registered as national and cultural associations, but with obvious political agendas. For example, the Cossack committee *Vozrozhdeniye* (Rebirth), based in Uralsk, early expressed their demand for the return of the territory of the Ural Cossacks that they believed had been unjustly taken from Russia and included in Kazakhstan. There exist a number of unregistered Cossack organisations in the north of Kazakhstan and there have also been several outbreaks of minor conflicts between the members of these associations and ethnic Kazakhs. The strong nationalist feelings of the Cossacks were confirmed in a survey of inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan. When asked if they were prepared to take up arms “to defend the interests of their people in inter-ethnic conflicts”, 42.9 per cent of the asked Cossacks answered that they would be prepared to do so compared with only 17.7 per cent Russians.¹⁵²

The sensitive question of the ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan has consequently also become one of the most important issues or, according to one researcher, the greatest problem in Russia’s relations to independent Kazakhstan.¹⁵³ According to the researcher Irina Zviagelskaya, there exists an extreme nationalist idea in Russia according to which the Slavic CIS states and the parts of Kazakhstan that is inhabited by Russians should be joined in one unitary state.¹⁵⁴ The influential writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn has proposed this idea that in a limited degree influenced the early Russian policy towards the CIS area under President Boris Yeltsin.¹⁵⁵ Yeltsin himself claimed that the northern part of Kazakhstan should belong to Russia, and this view has been reflected among some smaller groups in Kazakhstan, notably the Cossacks described above.¹⁵⁶ In this light, it is not surprising that Kazakhstan has been sensitive to the strong diaspora protection exercised by Russia and the implications this might have for the relations with Russia and for the internal stability in Kazakhstan, even if such extreme ideas have not dominated Russia’s official agenda. As a consequence, Kazakhstan has resisted Russia’s calls for establishment of dual citizenship.¹⁵⁷

The tensions do not appear to have been reduced in recent years. During the year 2000, Nursultan Nazarbayev faced severe political problems in the north of the country where the majority population of ethnic Slavs were asking the government to hold a referendum on whether Kazakhstan should join the Russian-Belorussian union or not. Furthermore, in January the same year, 22 Russian ultra-nationalists were put on trial in the northeastern city Ust-Kamenogorsk for conspiracy against the state and for trying to declare a pro-Russian republic in the north.¹⁵⁸ It is, however, not only the Russian minorities and their ethnic motherland that causes concerns for the Kazakh authorities – they have also taken care to avoid complications in their relationship with Uzbekistan. Although not comprising such a strikingly large minority as the Russians, the ethnic Uzbeks, who form majorities in some southern regions of Kazakhstan, are seen as a potential source of inter-ethnic conflict,

¹⁵² Alexandrov, Mikhail (1999) *Uneasy Alliance: Relations Between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Post-Soviet Era, 1992-1997*, Westport and London, Greenwood Press, pp.25-121.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.99.

¹⁵⁴ Zviagelskaia, Irina (1995) *The Russian Policy Debate on Central Asia*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, p.38.

¹⁵⁵ Sakwa, Richard (1996) *Russian Politics and Society*, London and New York, Routledge, p.289.

¹⁵⁶ Svanberg, Ingvar (1996) “Kazakstan – ett nytt land mellan Europa och Asien” in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.30.

¹⁵⁷ Webber, Mark (1997) *CIS Integration Trends. Russia and the Former Soviet South*, London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, p.28.

¹⁵⁸ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) “Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan”, *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 18 January, downloaded from the Internet 1 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011801.shtml>.

especially if Uzbekistan would choose to use them in its competition with Kazakhstan for regional influence.¹⁵⁹

The ethnic Uighurs living in the border area between Kazakhstan and China started moving into Kazakhstan from China already during the 19th century, although they were not called Uighurs until the 1920s. The last wave of Uighurs migrating from China to Kazakhstan arrived in 1960 and during the mid-1990s there were 185,000 Uighurs living in Kazakhstan. When the border between China and Kazakhstan opened in 1991, the Uighurs became an important link as they started to conduct trade across the border. The border contacts were further strengthened by the fact that the largest diaspora group of ethnic Kazakhs is living in China's northern Xienjiang region. At the same time, however, concerns grew in China that the Uighurs in Kazakhstan and the rest of Central Asia would unite with Uighurs in Xienjiang in the formation of a separatist movement.¹⁶⁰ These concerns have not been unfounded. The Uighurs has given rise to four Uighur separatist organisations in Almaty and the Almaty region. These groups are fighting for their aim to establish a separate Uighur state independent of both Kazakhstan and China. The Western Turkestan National Revolutionary Front was formed in Kazakhstan in 1991. The goal of this organisation under the leadership of Usupek Mulishy is to achieve independence for Western Turkestan with the use of radical means.¹⁶¹

Migration

According to the 1999 census, the number of permanent residents in Kazakhstan had dropped by 1.24 million or 7.7 per cent since 1989 and in 1999 amounted to 14,953,000 people. The external migration is a decisive factor behind this change. The net emigration was highest during the first years, reaching a peak of around 400,000 people in 1994. Then it slowly dwindled and in 2000 the negative migration balance had dropped more than threefold compared to 1994. People are mainly emigrating from Kazakhstan to other CIS countries. Russia accounted for approximately two thirds of Kazakhstan's migration exchange with the CIS countries throughout the 1990s. Most of these were emigrants, even though some people also immigrated to Kazakhstan from Russia. In the beginning of the 1990s, a significant number of people also emigrated to the Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and smaller numbers to Azerbaijan and Belarus.¹⁶²

In the year 2000, Kazakhstan only had a negative migration balance with Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine, whereas the migration balance with the other CIS countries was positive, with more than 5,000 people immigrating to Kazakhstan from Uzbekistan. However, in terms of ethnic groups only ethnic Kazakhs had a positive migration balance. Ethnic Russians still formed the main part of the emigrants (more than 58 per cent) followed by Germans and Ukrainians. Of the people who have emigrated from Kazakhstan to countries beyond the CIS over the past ten years, the vast majority has gone to Germany.¹⁶³ The Germans that have

¹⁵⁹ Petrov, N.I. & Gafarly, M.S. (2001) "The Course Towards Political Stability" in Vassiliev, Alexei (ed.) *Central Asia. Political & Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London, Saqi Books, p.48.

¹⁶⁰ Svanberg, Ingvar (1996) "Kazakstan – ett nytt land mellan Europa och Asien" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.34-37.

¹⁶¹ Burkhanov, K.N. (2000) *Extremism in Central Asia*, Almaty, Agance France Press; Ibragimov, H.: "Extremism", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 3 February 2000.

¹⁶² Klimova, Tamara (2001): "Migration Trends in Kazakhstan", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol.9, No.3, pp.175-176.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.176-179.

been living in Kazakhstan, constituting nearly a million people in 1989, are mainly descendants of the so-called Volga Germans that were deported from the Volga area to the northern part of Kazakhstan and Russian Siberia when Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁴

Since people emigrating from Kazakhstan are generally younger and better educated than the average inhabitants, the migration is having a negative effect on the country's labour potential. There are, however, also some people who have immigrated to Kazakhstan of which Russians constituted the largest group between 1991 and 1999 with 349,000 people (compared to the 1,072,000 Russians leaving Kazakhstan). The second largest group of immigrants during the same period consisted of Kazakhs returning from other CIS countries, Iran, Turkey and Mongolia (254,000 people), followed by Ukrainians, Germans, Tatars and Belorussians. All people arriving from Germany are likely to have earlier emigrated from Kazakhstan and the same is true for a large portion of the Russians arriving in Kazakhstan.¹⁶⁵

At present, around 4.1 million Kazakhs live outside the country's borders, including 1.5 million in Uzbekistan, 740,000 in Russia, 70,000 in Turkmenistan and around 30,000 in Afghanistan. According to a survey made in 1998 of the main reasons for emigration or re-emigration in Kazakhstan, family circumstances topped the list of reasons for both wanting to leave Kazakhstan and for returning to the country. The other reasons were mainly connected to education and job opportunities or standards of living. An analysis made of the status of repatriates in Kazakhstan shows that the return often is connected with significant problems. One major obstacle for the repatriates is the problem of regaining citizenship in Kazakhstan, which deprives them of property rights and permanent residence prospects.¹⁶⁶

The internal migration in Kazakhstan is also reported to be high as thousands of people from the southern provinces are moving to safer and more prosperous cities in the north of the country, even though the official figures for the movement is low. According to the President of the Association of Sociologists and Political Analysts, Bakytjamal Berkurtganov, the government is trying to hide the true figures of the exodus since a large portion of the migrants are supposed to be fleeing from the threat of Islamic militancy. Although no one can tell if or when the Islamic radical groups that have launched raids into Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan will enter Kazakhstan as well, people are leaving the most exposed area because they worry that these groups might come. According to military expert Askar Bakayev there are reasons for the less devoted Muslims living in the south to fear potential incursions from, for example, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan since they will be the first to suffer from such guerrilla attacks, which the Kazakh military is ill equipped to counter. As a consequence, most of the Russians and Slavs living in the area are going north, but also many ethnic Kazakhs. However, the difficult socio-economic situation in the south is also a reason for the migration to the north.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Svanberg, Ingvar (1992) "Kazakstan" in Gustavsson, Sven & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Gamla folk och nya stater. Det upplösta sovjetimperiet*, Stockholm, Gidlunds förlag, p.358.

¹⁶⁵ Klimova, Tamara (2001): "Migration Trends in Kazakhstan", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol.9, No.3, pp.178-182.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.179-183.

¹⁶⁷ Bekturganova, Bakhytjamal (2001) "Kazaks Flee South in Doves", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting Central Asia*, No.62, 27 July, downloaded from the Internet 6 August 2001 on info@iwpr.net.

Religiously Related Threats

The religious composition of the population in Kazakhstan

According to official sources from 2000, 47 per cent of the population in Kazakhstan are Muslims, whereas some unofficial sources put the figure as high as 65 per cent. The large majority of the Kazakh part of the population is Muslim, but due to the impact of Communism on the country for more than 70 years, their faith is not always very strong. In addition to the Russian orthodox Slavic part of the population, there are also some other small ethnic groups that are non-Muslim and adhere to either Christianity or some other faith than Islam. Moreover, according to one unofficial source, there has been a tendency in the Muslim part of the population to convert to Christianity during independence.¹⁶⁸

The role of the Islamic faith was rather weak among the Kazakhs even before the Soviet period. The Kazakhs, like the other Sunni Muslims in Central Asia, belong to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam that is known as one of the most liberal orientations of Islam. Moreover, the Kazakh nomads living on the steppe were not converted to Islam until 18th century. The knowledge of the religion has remained low and for many people the religion has been largely equivalent to the practice of the rituals. The regions on the border to Uzbekistan with a relatively large number of ethnic Uzbek citizens are the most religious Islamic regions in the country.¹⁶⁹ The estimated number of ethnic Kazakhs that adhere to the Islamic faith is 80.6 per cent whereas the figure for the Islamic Uzbeks in Kazakhstan is 100 per cent. Sunni Islam is generally stronger in the south-eastern part of the country. There is also a small area in the south of the country where Sufism plays a certain role, although the general impact of Sufism is not particularly strong in Kazakhstan. The number of people belonging to Shia Islam in Kazakhstan is low according to several sources of information, but there are no official statistics supporting this information.¹⁷⁰

Radical Islam in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has had relatively few radical Islamic movements operating on their territory and the authorities are trying to keep them out of the country. In May 2001, four alleged members of the orthodox Islamic Hizb-ut-Tahrir party were arrested for distributing leaflets calling for the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia. Two of the accused were found guilty of taking part in anti-constitutional activities, but the court failed to prove charges of

¹⁶⁸ Ablyzov, N.: "Islamic Extremism in Central Asia: a New Challenge and Complete Non-Readiness", *The Globe*, 5 October 1999, p.7; *Interview with Mufti of Kazakhstan* conducted by Olga Melkova in Almaty, 5 January 2001; *The Religious Situation in Kazakhstan* (2000), A social research report from the Centre of Humanitarian Research, Almaty, Republic Agency of Statistics and *Statistics about the Religious Situation in Kazakhstan* (2000) Almaty, Republic Agency of Statistics.

¹⁶⁹ Haghayeghi, Mehrdad (1995) *Islam and Politics in Central Asia*, New York, St. Martin's Press, pp.78-81 and Svanberg, Ingvar (1996) "Kazakhstan – ett nytt land mellan Europa och Asien" in Petersson, Bo & Svanberg, Ingvar (eds.) *Det nya Centralasien: fem forna sovjetrepubliker i omvandling*, Lund, Studentlitteratur, p.39.

¹⁷⁰ Ablyzov, N.: "Islamic Extremism in Central Asia: a New Challenge and Complete Non-Readiness", *The Globe*, 5 October 1999, p.7; Cultangaliva, A. (1999) "Evolution of Islam in Kazakhstan", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol.5, No.4; *Interview with Mufti of Kazakhstan* conducted by Olga Melkova in Almaty, 5 January 2001; *The Religious Situation in Kazakhstan* (2000), A social research report from the Centre of Humanitarian Research, Almaty, Republic Agency of Statistics and *Statistics about the Religious Situation in Kazakhstan* (2000) Almaty, Republic Agency of Statistics.

involvement in preparation of terrorist actions.¹⁷¹ Russia has charged Kazakhstan of allowing Chechen rebels to gain access to the Central Asian region through Kazakhstan. The experienced threat from radical Islam seems generally to have grown during the last years, much as it has done in the other Central Asian countries as well. In January 2000, President Nazarbayev made a statement in which he said he feared that Kazakhstan would be the next victim of the radical Islamic activities and he further claimed that the events that had taken place in Afghanistan, Tadjikistan and Chechnya were closely connected.¹⁷²

According to a statement made by the Kazakh Foreign Minister Yerlan Idrisov in 1999 to representatives of ethnic cultural centres in the country, Islamic fundamentalists – described by the minister as Wahhabis – were trying to establish bandit formations in the mountainous areas of southern Kazakhstan on the border to Uzbekistan. The border services and the law enforcement bodies of the South Kazakhstan Region were taking measures on the border to Uzbekistan in order to detect and prevent the attempts.¹⁷³ Kazakhstan has also deemed it necessary to find new ways to maintain their security against the new threats. In order to be able to detect “criminal elements”, the Kazakh foreign ministry in October 2000 declared their intention to introduce migration control cards along the Kazakh-Russian border and the same measure would be taken for the borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan.¹⁷⁴

Like the other Central Asian regimes, the authorities in Kazakhstan suppress all non-official religions quite harshly. As an example, two women were detained in Western Kazakhstan for trying to transport more than 7,000 pieces of literature of the Ilinite-Jehovist sect, which is not registered in the country. The literature, that was confiscated, was reported to have contained expressions insulting other religions. It further propagated religious exclusiveness and extremism as it claimed that this religion was superior to other faiths, which contradicts the Kazakh law on religion.¹⁷⁵

Economically Related Threats

Illegal trade

Like all other Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan produces, processes and transports drugs. There are extensive areas of wild growing poppy, primarily in the southern parts of Kazakhstan, as well as some hemp and ephedra plants. The pharmaceutical factory in Shimkent is the largest producing facility for narcotic substances in the CIS and, according to some information, illegal production is also carried out at this facility. The Kazakh territory is like the Russian Far East used for transit of drugs from China. Drug traffickers can operate

¹⁷¹ RFE/RL Kazakh Service (2001) *Trial of Four Alleged Members of Hezb-ut-Tahrir Party Ends*, 11 May, downloaded from the Internet 18 October 2001 on <http://www.rferl.org/bd/ka/reports/archives/2001/05/0-110501.html>.

¹⁷² Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 18 January, downloaded from the Internet 1 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011801.shtml>.

¹⁷³ Interfax Kazakhstan news agency: "Islamic fundamentalists trying to set up in south Kazakhstan – foreign minister", 6 November 1999, in *BBC SWB SU/3687 G/2*, 9 November 1999.

¹⁷⁴ Interfax-Kazakhstan news agency: "Kazakhs plan migration control measures with Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan", 2 October 2000 in *BBC SWB SU/3962 G/1*, 4 October 2000.

¹⁷⁵ Kazakh Commercial Television: "Illegal religious literature seized in western Kazakhstan", 17 July 2001 in *BBC Monitoring Global Newslines – Central Asia Political*, 18 July 2001, from BBC Monitoring topic@mon.bbc.co.uk.

relatively freely on the almost totally transparent Kazakh-Russian border, stretching for nearly 7,000 kilometres. The Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs has stated that 93 per cent of the marijuana found on the Russian drug market comes from Kazakhstan and 85 per cent of the hashish and 73 per cent of the opium in Russia is either grown in Kazakhstan or transported through the country.¹⁷⁶

In 1999 the police seized 20 tons of heroin that mainly emanated from Afghanistan, but this was only thought to be about one percent of the total amount flowing through Kazakhstan. According to some officials, the war against the drugs is already lost since drug addiction had already grown 20 times since 1999 and drug related crimes had quadrupled.¹⁷⁷ Officially, there are 37,408 drug abusers in Kazakhstan, but the authorities estimate the real number to be seven to eight times higher. The average age of abusers is falling, as is the age of traffickers. In 2000, increasing numbers of children (and women) were arrested for abuse and the law-enforcement agencies arrested more under-aged traffickers than in the past. Marijuana and heroin are the drugs most abused and the use of heroin has increased due to an increase in the heroin trafficking.¹⁷⁸

Conclusions

The large Russian minority represents a sensitive ethnic issue for independent Kazakhstan. The northern part of the country has been contested and is heavily influenced by Russia. This has prompted a nationalisation policy in order to gain a strong and unified Kazakh nation. These “Kazakhisation” measures have however had negative economic consequences for the country. Firstly, they clash with the need to maintain good relations with Russia, who remains a very important economic partner for Kazakhstan. Secondly, the Russian population that has migrated in large numbers since the fall of the Soviet empire formed an important highly educated and specialised part of the Kazakh workforce that the country’s economy badly needs. Approximately a third of the emigrated Russians have returned to Kazakhstan again. Kazakhstan also a quite large group of ethnic Uighurs living on its territory, which creates sensitive relations with the country’s powerful Asian neighbour, China. There are at least four Uighur separatist organisations based in the region round Almaty that Kazakhstan needs to monitor carefully in order not to irritate China.

Religiously the country has remained relatively calm in comparison with the region at large. Almost all non-Russians in Kazakhstan are Muslims, but the faith is by tradition very unorthodox. This has caused a fear of retributions in the case radical Islamic would spread from the other countries of the region to southern Kazakhstan. There are increasing reports about radical Islamic groups operating in Kazakhstan, but the most active radical groups are still mainly concentrated to the countries that surround the Ferghana valley. The Uzbek part of the population that is in majority in some of the southern regions is generally more religious than the average citizen and it is from these same regions that most of the reports

¹⁷⁶ Zviagelskaia, Irina D. & Naumkin, Vitali V. (1999) “Non-Traditional Threats, Challenges and Risks in the Former Soviet South” in Menon, Rajan, Fedorov, Yuri E. & Nodia, Ghia (eds.) *Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia: the 21st Century Security Environment*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., p.230.

¹⁷⁷ Rashid, Ahmed (2001) "Central Asia Summary: Recent Developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan", *Eurasianet Eurasia Insight*, 18 January, downloaded from the Internet 1 October 2001 on <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav011801.shtml>.

¹⁷⁸ NATO Partnership for Peace Documentation Center *Europe and Central Asia*, downloaded from the Internet 19 October 2001 on www.isn.ethz.ch/pfdpc/e_index.htm.

about religious extremist activities have emanated. Regardless of the absence of major religiously based radical activity, the authorities nevertheless suppress all elements that show any sign of threatening the position of the incumbent regime in the same manner as in the other Central Asian countries and do not allow opposing religious views. The more orthodox religious groups in Kazakhstan are thus forced to operate illegally in Kazakhstan as they do in the other countries in the region. The illegal drug trade is continuing and is likely to do so, since Kazakhstan is an important transit country for drugs to Russia and then onwards to Europe.

Summary and Conclusion

The risk for increased ethnic conflicts and possibly breakdown is probably still most imminent for Tadjikistan, despite the present relative calm. Kyrgyzstan, which is the most ethnically fragmented state in the Central Asian region, has already had several minor inter-ethnic conflicts and the tensions could easily escalate because of the difficult socio-economic situation in the country, especially in relation to the Uzbek minority. Even if the authorities have been cautious not to aggravate the tensions between the ethnic groups because of their dependency on Uzbekistan and wish to maintain good relations with the western neighbour, they cannot control all local disputes that might spread quickly, as has been shown by several examples in the past. Tadjikistan is also the most exposed country in relation to an increased influx of refugees from Afghanistan, even though it is something that worries the regimes in all the countries. Uzbekistan has not appeared to exercise the same caution and has taken several measures that might aggravate the tensions both in relation to the ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan and, perhaps even more so, in relation to the severely pressured Tadjik minority in Uzbekistan. An escalation of any of these conflicts could easily spread across the rest of the region, because of the presence of minority groups in all countries, especially ethnic Uzbek groups.

Kazakhstan has remained ethnically relatively calm and the risk for increased tensions in relation to the large Russian minority in the north does not seem to have increased, even if the question remains sensitive. The question of the Russians seems to be more of an inconvenience than a threat of conflicts, which is further increased by the economic consequences of the large migration of the highly qualified Russian workforce. The same could be said about the ethnic Uighurs in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The two countries have been anxious not to provoke China and keep the separatist tendencies among their groups of ethnic Uighurs closely monitored. Turkmenistan is probably the least exposed country in relation to the threat of ethnic conflicts, both because of the regime and the policy for maintaining inter-ethnic calm and because it is ethnically a relatively homogeneous country in relation to the other Central Asian states. Like the other Central Asian states, however, the internal problem of tribal or clan disputes is a potential risk also for Turkmenistan that could easily escalate since the same clans or tribes have been favoured both during the Soviet period and after independence, which has created deep discontent among the others.

Uzbekistan is the most religious country in the region and the religious development in Uzbekistan is crucial for the development in the whole area. An increase in radical Islamic activities in Uzbekistan would have consequences for the whole Central Asian region because of Uzbekistan's geographic location, large diaspora groups in neighbouring countries and the overall strong impact on the regional Islamic development exercised by Uzbekistan, or rather, the Uzbek people. At least in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, it is the Uzbek ethnic minorities that are the most devoted Muslims in the region and they live in areas adjacent to Uzbekistan. The authorities in Kazakhstan are consequently afraid that radical religious activities and groups might spread from Uzbekistan to the Uzbek-dominated areas in southern Kazakhstan. The same fear can be found in Turkmenistan, even though they do not acknowledge it publicly. The radical religious activities have already spread to Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan and the authorities now believe that the radical groups are targeting their countries in their own rights. The hard pressure put on all religious and other potential opposition groups in all the Central Asian countries does not seem to be abating and has already created a better

breeding ground for the more radical groups, especially in the most socio-economic disadvantaged areas in the region. There is a clear connection between poor areas with high unemployment and strong adherence to radical Islamic groups and ideas and as long as the present hard socio-economic conditions coupled with increasing authoritarian measures prevails, the more radical Islamic groups will continue to find new recruits.

The illegal drug trade is an acknowledged problem for all countries in the region that is also likely to continue because of the difficult socio-economic conditions and the lack of properly guarded borders. The measures that have been taken to control the drug trade have so far not been efficient enough even to decrease the trade to any significant extent. The external Afghan-Tadjik border remains a particularly weak spot, which has consequences for the whole Central Asian region since the internal regional borders are still very poorly guarded. Even if the flow of drugs from Afghanistan would decrease, the hard socio-economic conditions and lack of other prospects for finding good income would probably lead to an increase in the internal production of drugs in the Central Asian countries.

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