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## From the Editors

Dear Readers, thank you for your interest in the second issue of the bulletin "The Kazakhstan insider". We continue our review of the political and social risks of the Republic of Kazakhstan and we hope that these materials will help you make informed decisions.

This newsletter is devoted to the risk of terrorism and extremism in Kazakhstan. The issue of terrorism, unfortunately, has become one of the most debated subjects in the world. A terrorist attack on November 12, 2011 in Taraz (southern Kazakhstan) made it pertinent again also for Kazakhstan.

Are there any real grounds for the growth of religious and social extremism in Kazakhstan? How does the authority respond to these challenges? What internal and external factors contribute to the increase of these risks? You will read more about it in the article "The threat of terrorism and extremism in Kazakhstan."

An equally important topic is discussed in the article on the new draft of the Act on national security. It is presented by the authorities as an effective tool to maintain stability in the country, and it is therefore likely to be enacted in the near future and may radically change the lives of citizens of the Republic.

We are grateful for the comments and suggestions that we received after the first edition of the bulletin and we would like to encourage you to continue the open dialog on the matters which you find interesting.

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## Threats of terrorism and extremism in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan, earlier considered as an oasis of stability in Central Asia, in 2011 unexpectedly demonstrates a sudden increase in levels of socio-religious extremism. The act of terrorism on November 12 in Taraz (southern Kazakhstan), in which eight people were killed, including five workers of law-enforcement agencies, became the fourth such episode since May 2011, by individuals radicals or terrorist cells. In all the cases the acts of terrorism are associated with representatives of the radical Islamic movement.

The target of the attacks in Aktobe [1], Astana [2], Atyrau [3] and Taraz [4] raises questions about possible reasons for destabilization in the country, as well as how effectively the authorities respond to these calls.

### Religionism and social foundation for the growth of extremism

According to preliminary data of the 2009 national census, about 63% of the population of Kazakhstan are ethnic Kazakhs. Another 10% are representatives of the Uzbek, Uyghur and Tatar ethnic groups. Traditionally, all these groups are Sunni Muslims deriving from the Hanafi tradition, which formally merged under the authority of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SBMK). Other denominations of Islam are practiced by less than 1% of Kazakhs, while the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) holds a fairly strong position [5].

According to the study carried out by the human rights organization "Forum 18" [6], only SBMK and ROC are recognized by the government of Kazakhstan as the country's traditional religions. With regard to other religious movements, both registered and unregistered, a complex of discriminatory actions, such as raids, interrogations, threats, fines and restrictions on social and charitable activities have been imposed.

All this comes amid growing interest of the Kazakhs in the traditions of Islam which are new in the country. This interest is most apparent in the South and West of the country, dominated by the Kazakh-speaking population.

According to the experts [7], one of the main factors which is contributing to the increased popularity of the new trends is the financial and economic crisis that began in the second half of 2007. Thus, Koranists and Salafits, compared with the representatives of the SBMK, much more easily establish contact with their potential followers and often help them financially. It is also quite significant that dissatisfaction with the current socio-economic situation is most strongly felt in the Western oil-producing regions (read about the oil protests in the first issue The Kazakhstan insider [8]).

### The Law on Religion

The situation became even more strained after N. Nazarbaev, the President of Kazakhstan, signed the Act "On religious activity and religious organizations" in October this year. Under this Act, the following was introduced: mandatory re-registration of the existing religious organizations, the ban on unregistered religious activity, mandatory censorship of religious literature, the necessity to obtain permission to open new locations to perform religious rites, as well as a ban on the performance of religious rites (including namaz) in public institutions, including universities, hospitals, prisons and the Parliament [9]. The main motivation for the instatement of the Act was the need to fight against religious radicalism.

At the same time, the law on religion was heavily criticized both by religious communities which are a part of the SBMK and the ROC system and by international organizations such as OSCE and Free-



Nursultan Nazarbaev signed the controversial Act.  
Photo: islamsng.com

domHouse [10]. According to experts, this law will force religious communities of a "non-traditional" Islam [11] to go even deeper underground, and the oppression of religious freedoms will contribute to the radicalization of moods even of those Kazakhs who worship under traditional religions of the country [12].

It is noteworthy that immediately after the adoption of the Act by the Parliament of Kazakhstan, the group "Soldiers of the Khalifat" posted a video message on the Internet. In the message they put forward a demand that the Act be immediately revoked and a few weeks later they claimed responsibility for bombings in the city of Atyrau on October 31 [13].



#### External factors

When considering the growth of extremism in Kazakhstan, including religious extremism, one cannot leave unnoticed the external forces which contribute to the increase of terrorist threat and which can use the social tensions in the country to satisfy their own ends.

And so, in May 2011 Afghan Talibans issued a statement in which they warned the authorities of Kazakhstan against the "serious consequences" of their decision to join the international operation in Afghanistan [14]. In this context, one must take into account the United States plans to withdraw its own troops from Afghanistan by 2014, which could seriously affect the balance of military force and stability in the region.

Also, there is evidence of ties between the Kazakh extremists and radical groups of other countries of the CIS, in particular - the Russian Federation. For example, in the past few years, the Russian security services have arrested dozens of Kazakh citizens who took part in the combat operations in the North Caucasus [15]. Lest we forget about the po-

tential impact of the "trouble spots" in the neighboring countries - Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan on the situation in Kazakhstan.

#### Effectiveness of a "heavy hand"

The Kazakh authorities decided to deal with the issue of the growth of religious and social extremism by adopting a heavy handed approach. This is not only exemplified by the Act on religion, but also the Act on national security which is now being prepared for instatement and the authoritarian style (traditional for Kazakhstan) adopted when addressing humanitarian and social issues. But the effectiveness of this approach raises some concerns.

According to the study "Political extremism, terrorism and the media in Central Asia" carried out in 2008 by the organization "International media support" (Copenhagen, Denmark) with the participation of Kazakh and Kyrgyz partner organizations [16], the states of Central Asia often abuse the threat of terrorism, using it as a rhetorical tool to justify their actions against their political opponents. At the same time, such phenomena as inequitable distribution of wealth, non-compliance with the law, the suppression of the secular opposition and other groups who are dissatisfied with the socio-economic and political situation, provide fertile ground for radicalization of some representatives of society in the form of political extremism, religious fundamentalism and terrorism.

A special role in this context is given to the media. Since, under the influence of the authorities, it does not provide a platform for open discussion regarding the reasons for dissatisfaction and "discharge" of social pressure, the media are unable to play the role of a catalyst for peaceful resolution of social conflicts. Citizens of the country, having lost confidence in the media, trust rumours more often, and therefore the opportunity to quickly and objectively inform the public in emergency situations is lost, as well as the effective conduct of explanatory work.

#### Near-future prospect

Immediately after the terrorist attack in Taraz, the Kazakh president signed a decree dissolving the lower house of the Parliament and announcing

early elections in January 2012. This step can be viewed as an attempt of the ruling elite to stabilize the internal situation by way of a peaceful elimination of competitors who can benefit from the current level of social unrest [17].

At the same time, on November 18 the media reported on the full evacuation of the American public organization "Peace Corps" from Kazakhstan. And although the official version of the motives be-

hind this demarche was not made public, in private comments, the representatives of the mission declared that the decision was made for security reasons [18].

These events prove that from a security point of view as well as from a political point of view, Kazakhstan is entering into a phase of instability, at least - for the short term.

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## A draft of a new Act on national security: tightening of control and potential source of civil opposition

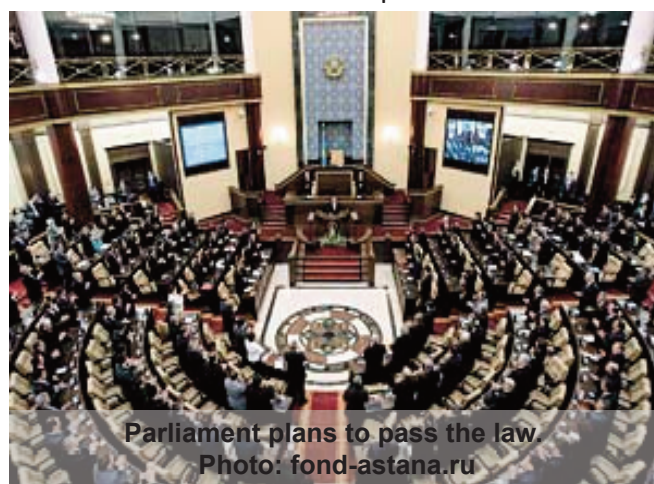
In Kazakhstan, a draft of the Act "On National Security" of October 19, 2011 was made public. The Act includes an expanded list of activities which are deemed to pose a threat to national security, it provides tighter control over NGOs and individuals. Among human rights activists and political opposition this draft has already been given the name of a "helmet with a knot around his neck," by which they condemned the document as being undemocratic [1]. The next meeting of the Senate (the upper house of the Parliament), on which the bill may be presented for consideration, will be held on November 24, 2011 [2].

The new version of the Act "On National Security" was created upon the initiative of Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan, which he expressed at the meeting of the Security Council on March 15, 2011 [3]. Before that, the question of national security on a large scale was raised in 2005, when the amendments of 13 laws were adopted, including the Acts regulating the activities of religious and social organizations.

The bill should be regarded in the context of the draft of the National Security Strategy for the years 2012-2016, developed by the Government. At the meeting of the Security Council on October 28, President Nazarbayev raised the question of adopting a set of measures "designed for the medium term, contributing to the preservation of peace and harmony, stability and sustainable development of the Kazakh society, further strengthening of the economy and the state, as well as neutralisation of security threats and challenges of Kazakhstan." Also, the members of the meeting reviewed the issue of practical implementation of the Act "On foreign intelligence", adopted in 2010 [4].

In 2011 in Kazakhstan, there were a number of events which violated the traditional way of peaceful civilian life, and questioned the cultivated image of a stable partner and a peaceful state. In May, a car fulminated in close proximity to the National security Building. Later, there was an explosion in a building of special services in Astana. In July, near

the city of Aktobe, nine people, suspected of being members of clandestine radical organizations were killed. In late October, two explosions occurred in Atyrau [5]. In expert circles it is believed that the reason for the explosions is the constant attempts made by the authorities to establish broad control over religious organizations. It should be noted that according to the report of the U.S. government on religious freedom for the period of July-December 2010, "the state did not restrict freedom of religion of the majority of registered religious groups, and at the same time it ensured compliance with existing restrictions with relating to unregistered groups and some other minority religious groups. None of the apolitical religious groups were banned," [6]. This opinion of American experts confirmed the political motivation for the adoption of such laws.



Parliament plans to pass the law  
Photo: fond-astana.ru

Some articles of the draft Act "On national security" may be used to limit the activities of opposition organizations. Defenders of human rights point out that certain clauses of the act clearly protect the current political system. Thus, in paragraph 8 of Article 5 the list of the key national interests includes "the inviolability of the constitutional system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, including the state's independence, unitary structure and a presidential form of government as well as the integrity and inviolability of state borders and the inalienability of the country." The above-named provision may be used to suppress a debate about the form of governance of the country at the time of elections. Also, there may be various interpretations of paragraph 17 of

Article 5, which speaks about "the promotion of policy initiatives aimed at strengthening of the positive image and prestige of the Republic of Kazakhstan at international level." This rule may be directed at social activists engaged in the process of analyzing and monitoring of the situation in Kazakhstan.

This bill provides for such threats as "terrorism, extremism and separatism in all their forms and manifestations", "intelligence-subversive activity of special services of foreign states, as well as of organizations and individuals, aimed to the detriment of the national security of Kazakhstan" may affect the operation of international and foreign financial and social structures. Paragraph 16 of Article 6 also determines "negative information and psychological impact on the Kazakh citizens, the society and the state made by destructive-minded foreign entities and criminal structures in order to manipulate the mass consciousness" to be a threat. Paragraph 18 of the same article states the "damage to national interests at international level, the political image and economic rating of Kazakhstan." We should also note the lack of public debate on this

issue, during which the arguments of both advocates and opponents of the legislation could be presented. It indicates that there will be a transfer of a dispute from the sphere of a concept into the sphere of civil and political opposition in the near future.

Analysis of the paragraphs of the draft Act "On national security of the Republic of Kazakhstan" in the context of the increasing number of incidents of extremism suggests that an unusual configuration is developing in the country. On one hand, the government is taking steps to maintain stability and security, on the other hand, it is infringing the rights and freedoms of its citizens. Such policies may have benefits in the short term, but they also carry the preconditions for the intensification of the conflict between the government and its opponents not only in the parliamentary manner, but also with the use of less civilized means. The presence of such instability will definitely have an adverse effect on Kazakhstan's position in terms of investment attractiveness ratings and evoke an increase in the level of risk indicators for businesses.

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