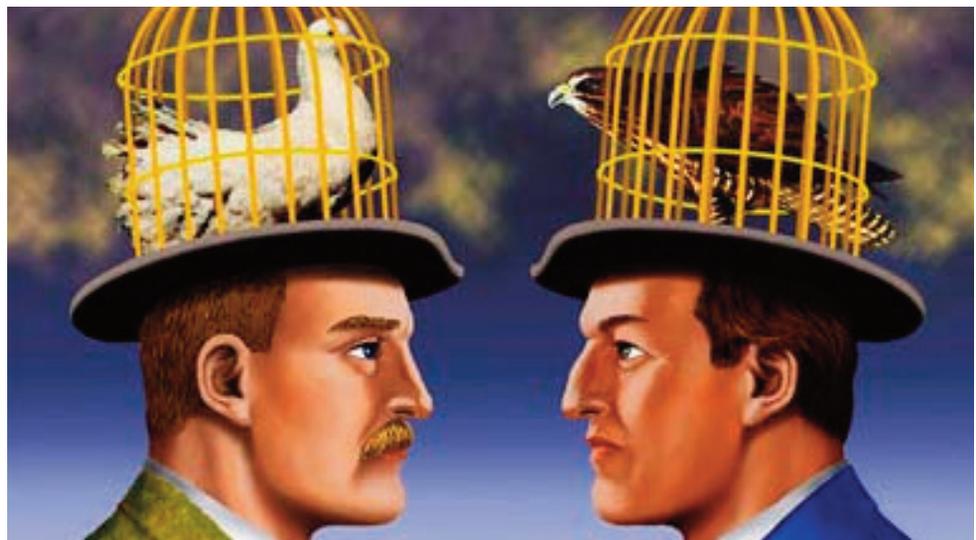


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From the Editors

We present you with the sixth issue of information-analytical bulletin *The Kazakhstan insider*.

This issue focuses on two pressing issues for the life of Kazakhstan, namely: the opposition of two groups: 'doves' and 'hawks' in Kazakhstan's political elite, as well as the adequacy of current anti-terrorist rhetoric used by the country's government.

Who dominates - the 'hawks' or 'doves' in the struggle for influence over the current situation and for 'Nazarbaev's legacy' in the future? Is the policy of 'raw materials in return for democracy', which is used by European countries toward Kazakhstan, correct, taking into consideration long-term prospects? Read about it in the article '*Doves against Hawks*'.

Is terrorism a real threat or a tool of political struggle in Kazakhstan? Where should we look for the current centers of religious fundamentalism, and how does the government respond to these challenges? These issues are discussed in the article '*Playing with fire*'.

We are pleased to have been of assistance,
Analytical Department, The Open Dialog Foundation

OPEN DIALOG
FOUNDATION
3 Maja St. 18/4
20-078, Lublin
tel. +48 507 739 025

kz.insider@odfoundation.eu

Doves against hawks. The confrontation continues

According to the Presidential Decree of the 8th of May, 2012, Prime Minister Karim Masimov replaced the head of the presidential administration Aslan Musin in the post of the head of the Higher Attestation Commission for Extraordinary Certification of law enforcement workers [1]. This seemingly minor decree has a significant impact on the balance of power in Kazakhstan's ruling elite. It provides for verification of professional suitability, but also gives powers to change the personnel of law enforcement agencies, including the General Prosecutor's Office, the Department on Fighting Economic and Corruption Crimes, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Emergency Situations and Ministry of Finance.

At the same time, the decree indicates that the position of the group of 'hawks', one of the key figures of which is Aslan Musin, was weakened. Now the 'hawks' will look for new opportunities to influence the current situation and the leader of the country, and the results of their confrontation with the 'doves' will determine the configuration of social and political life in the near future.

Styles of play

The health condition of the 72-year-old president of the Republic of Kazakhstan is deteriorating; he spends a lot of time in foreign hospitals, and it significantly turns up the heat of the backstage political struggle in the country. Elite groups of aspirants

to 'Nazarbaev's legacy' play out with the use of complex combinations, which have features of the political styles of 'doves' and 'hawks'.

While 'doves' are often oriented to the backstage peaceful settlement of hard situations, even deadlocks and in many things they are close to Western political mentality, the 'hawks' prefer to resolve political problems through the use of force. The most prominent 'doves' of Kazakh elite are: Nurtai Abykayev, the chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan, and its allies - Akhmetzhan Yesimov and Serik Umbetov [2].

As for the 'hawks', the key figures of this group are considered to be the following persons: the head of the Presidential Administration Aslan Musin, and Minister of the Interior Kalmukhanbet Kasymov. These are the very people whom the opposition press accused of violent dispersal of demonstrations in the city Zhanaozen, in which at least 16 civilians were killed [3].

The 'hawks' fly up and then fall

In the recent years Kazakhstan was dominated by the group of 'hawks'. It is they who sanctioned the infamous arrests of opposition figures and incommensurate journalists. In no small measure was the dominance of the 'hawks' made possible thanks to the pragmatic policy of Western countries, described by analysts as 'raw materials in exchange for democracy'. In other words, many EU countries



N. Nazarbayev and A. Musin. Photo: RFE/RL

and the United States turned a blind eye (and in many cases, they still keep doing it) on the internal political situation, the failure to observe the civil and human rights of the people of Kazakhstan in exchange for lucrative contracts in the sphere of production of oil, gas, iron ore and many other minerals.

But the situation has begun to change after the tragic events in Zhanaozen and the series of arrests of the opposition activists which took place in January-February, 2012. The response of the international community to these facts impelled the European Parliament to take an unprecedentedly strict resolution on Kazakhstan [4], which, in particular, has become a statement of political risks for business activity in Kazakhstan and it increased the probability of international isolation of the country if the oppression continues.

'Doves' take over the initiative

Following the EP resolution, 'doves' seized the initiative for a certain time, as evidenced by a series of impulsive and not always legitimate decisions made by the authorities. In particular, it was the release from detention of Natalia Sokolova, a human rights defender and the lawyer of the 'Karazhanbas-munai' Oil Company, and Igor Vinyavskiy, the editor-in-chief of the 'Vzglyad' newspaper; he was charged under Art. 170 of the Criminal Code (calls for violent overthrow or change of the constitutional order).

Vinyavskiy's release under an amnesty law (although at that time he was still under investigation and has not been convicted of any crime) occurred on the day of adoption of the above mentioned resolution by the European Parliament. As stated by Alia Turusbekova, the wife of the arrested leader of the 'Alga!' party Vladimir Kozlov, Igor Vinyavskiy's criminal case was political and so, his release was political as well [5].

It is believed that a group of 'doves' pushed the plan of the release of political opponents in order to re-establish the reputation of the authorities in the eyes of the Western countries, and to reduce the tension in relations between the authorities and the opposition. The results of the policy of 'doves' could be seen, in particular, in open judicial

proceedings on the events in Zhanaozen and Shetpe; at the same time, one can hardly say that these proceedings complied with the basic principles of justice [6].

Thus, while Ukraine and Belarus have shown a complete disregard for the attempts of establishing a dialogue with the EU, the above mentioned steps gave Europe the occasion to look at Kazakhstan with 'different eyes' and made it possible to carry out further negotiations on a new cooperation agreement between the two parties.

Nazarbaev's standpoint

Watching the confrontation between 'doves' and 'hawks', which culminates on the example of the relationship between Nurtai Abykayev and Aslan Musin, it seems that the 'national leader' was cornered by opposing factions, and it becomes very difficult for him to find the balance in this complex situation regarding domestic policy.

A striking example of how Mr. Nazarbaev is trying to keep the situation from getting out of control is the story of the statement on the resignation of the chairman of the National Security Committee, which was publicised in early April [7]. According to



N. Abykaev. Photo: RFE/RL

insider reports, a friend from the young years and a longtime associate of the president is unlikely to allow himself to undertake such an initiative unless absolutely necessary. Perhaps, even if it is true that Abykayev filed an application of resignation, then he probably filed it at the initiative of the President, and the application must have been filed not only by him but by all three actors - Akybaev, Masimov and Mussin. It is also likely that the statements were left to lie on the table in Nazarbayev's office as insurance for an emergency situation [8].

Probably Nazarbaev realises that the lingering political conflict cannot last forever, especially since it seriously hampers the constructive work of the state machine. Time is not in favor of the president, and so soon we will see what choice 'the leader of the nation' is going to make.

One step forward, two steps back

If one looks from the side, there is no systematic positive or negative dynamics of the socio-political situation in Kazakhstan behind this opposition of 'doves' and 'hawks'. On the one hand, the government allowed open judicial proceedings on the events in Zhanaozen and free access to them. On the other hand, it prohibited the media to make a video and audio recording and to use computers, and with the help of a dubious testimony from secret witnesses, the government is trying to reduce its guilt regarding the incidents in question [9]. Also, the accusation of Alexander Pavlov, Muratbek Ketebaev and Mukhtar Ablyazov of preparation of terrorist acts, after the release of Natalia Sokolova and Igor Vinyavskiy's amnesty, seem not quite logical.

In terms of the geopolitical situation, it is not convenient for Kazakhstan to limit itself to the role of

a situational partner – a supplier of energy and mineral resources for Europe, which is what the format of relations 'raw material in exchange for democracy' leads to. Bearing in mind that the country is located between the two giant states (not only in terms of its geographical position, but also its economic one), the loss of balance and multi-vector foreign policy of Kazakhstan will reduce opportunities of the country to be more or less independent. And taking into consideration the authoritarian reality of Russia and China, the president and his future successors are unlikely to be interested in the prospect of becoming the regional princes under the ruling of Moscow or Beijing.

As for the reaction of Europe to the events and judicial processes in Kazakhstan, in order to obtain a stable operation in the future, it would be logical to toughen the stance on combating anti-authoritarian trends, and to support initiatives regarding democratisation of the socio-political life. And this requires a coherent foreign policy stance and systematic work with liberal groups of the Kazakh political elite, as well as providing support to the democratic opposition in development of the civil society.

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Playing with fire: the authorities of Kazakhstan themselves increase the terrorist threat.

Terrorism in the modern world somewhat resembles the notorious medieval scourge of God – everyone has heard about it, everyone fears it, but few have seen it firsthand, so the phenomenon is cluttered with rumours, some incredible stories and conspiracy theories. Kazakhstan is no exception to this; this country whose citizens learned about terrorism only from foreign films, suddenly turned into a powder keg. Explosions that occurred last year in Taraz, Atyrau, Aktobe and Astana, have led to a proliferation of different versions of what is happening and a tool for the manipulation of the government and the media.

On the 4th of April, 2012, First Deputy of the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Kazakhstan Johann Merkel has announced the development of a new Code of Criminal Procedure, in which the punishments of terrorist activities were tightened [1]. The appearance of such declarations even six months ago would be very logical, as from February to October 2011 the situation in the country was obviously very tense. But why did the work on the new Code of Criminal Procedure begin almost six months later? Why wasn't the code amended, for example, in July 2011? After all, it seems that the series of extremist attacks ended on the 12th of November, 2011, and the situation has somewhat stabilised.

Terrorism as an identification mark of the opposition

On the 28th of March, the General Prosecutor's Office of Kazakhstan informed [2] that suspects in the organisation of new terrorist attacks were detained. According to the information reported on the website of the General Prosecutor's Office, organisers of the 24 explosions, which allegedly were successfully prevented, were Aleksandr Pavlov, the head of Mukhtar Ablyazov's personal security, and Muratbek Ketebaev, Ablyazov's confidant, who was the co-founder of the 'Alga!' opposition party, and now heads the 'Civil activity' Foundation. Obviously, the main instigator of the prevented attacks, according to prosecutors, was Mukhtar Ablyazov.

As soon as the 3th of April, a video film appeared on the Internet, in which the detained 'accomplice' of Ketebaev and Pavlov supposedly gives evidence supporting the version of the prosecutor's office. But after a closer analysis [3] of this video film it becomes clear that it is a grand hoax, created by law enforcement agencies..

Statements made by the prosecutor's office are only a part of the massive oppression of Muratbek Ketebaev and other opposition politicians. In particular, the entire property of M. Ketebaev was seized on the 28th of January, 2012 [4], and on the 24th of March Ketebaev was forced to flee abroad.

Ketebaev's case is not unique. Attempts are made to accuse the opposition not only of terrorism, but of all possible sins against humanity. For example, the leader of the unregistered party 'Alga!' Vladimir Kozlov, who was accused of 'inciting social hatred', now remains in custody. He was charged with distribution of literature and other materials that supposedly contribute to increasing social tension. It was Kozlov and his colleagues whom the authorities blame for the Zhanaozen tragedy [5].

All these facts prompt us to conclude that it may be convenient for the leadership of Kazakhstan to spread the myth of oppositionists-extremists to legitimise persecution and, more importantly, to discredit political opponents.



Don't hurt the pals

But the overall image of the Kazakh authorities as fighters against terrorism and extremism is corrupted by one point - namely, the figure of Aslbek Mussin, the son of the head of the Presidential Administration of Kazakhstan, who is associated with the movement of so-called 'Koranists' (as the press calls them), or 'Izgi Amal' (as they call themselves).

Koranism is the direction of Islam that accepts only the Koran as the sole source of religious guidance, rejecting the Sunnah (the description of the life and deeds of the Prophet) and Ijma (the teachings of the Ulema). It would seem that is just one of the branches of Islam and as such, it should not be the source of any problems, just like the teachings of the Christian church is not a direct cause of the Crusades. But the root of the problem in such cases is usually hidden in an unhealthy fundamentalism, intolerance towards other religious or cultural groups, as well as in inability to co-exist. And these are the symptoms observed in the new movement [6].

Aslbek Musin himself claims [7] that he is not associated with 'Izgi Amal' in legal sense, but it did not prevent him from being an ideological supporter of the movement. In his interviews [8], on the one hand, he expresses his admiration for the United States, which in his opinion, created a powerful state on the basis of a single religion, and he is in favour of one religion for the whole Kazakhstan. On the other hand, he does not mention the fact that modern American society is built on the principle



Aslbek Musin

of religious tolerance.

By simple logical thinking it is fairly easy to determine the foundation of the religious doctrine on which Aslbek is going to build 'the future Kazakhstan'. Even today, apparently, with the support of his father, he is known for giving lectures to the staff of the National Security Committee [9], as well as for his open advocacy work in the environment of the national and regional elite [10].

But the problem is that Aslbek Musin does not just perfect himself spiritually and communicate with government officials, studying Islam. After the murder of police officers in the Aktobe Province in July 2011, it was reported that the radical Islamists in Shubarshi (the Aktobe Province) are financed by Aslbek himself and by the president's nephew-Kairat Satybaldy [11].

This isolated incident went unnoticed by a wide range of media and security forces, but in March 2012, a new 'story' came up in the life of Aslan Musin's son. According to some reports, workers of the Ministry of the Interior recorded Aslbek's conversations with people involved in organising terrorist attacks in 2011, but at the urgent request of Musin, Sr., information was withheld from the press and removed from the affairs of the law enforcement agencies [12]. No verifications, interrogations or detentions were carried out.

Double standards

Kazakhstan is a country in which many religions and denominations co-exist [13], and this by itself increases the likelihood of a conflict. It is interesting that, although the acts of sectarian violence in 2012 have not been registered, the index of religious tensions in the country is still quite high [14]. It is worth noting that the researchers of terrorism [15] state that religious fundamentalism by itself rarely becomes a source of extremism. Much higher chances of a recourse to acts of terrorism exist in those religious movements that pursue also ethnic, political or territorial objectives (in the case of the movements, supported by Aslbek, their political goals are transparent- after Nazarbayev's retirement, religious strife can be a very important factor in the fight for his heritage).

At the same time, the number of convicted sup-

porters of the 'non-traditional' trends of Islam is growing all the time. As stated by the head of the 'Almaty Helsinki Committee' Ninel Fokina, only as of 2008, in closed court hearings, without the presence of convicts, 400 to 700 Muslims were convicted of extremist activity (human rights activists believe that the guilt of most of them was not proven) [16].

According to the experts' estimates, in 2012, this figure increased significantly (and it reaches the number of up to 1,500 people), and the existing social contradictions which were clearly manifested in oil workers' strikes in the Mangistau Province, only increase the supporters of extreme Islam. It is also evident that the Islamist opposition (due to current trends, the prerequisites for its development are multiplying), will not seek any contact with the West and does not even know how to talk about the future with Europe and are not planning to do so.

The Kazakh authorities are showing an enviable vigilance when it comes to opposition activists, and at the same time, they pay no attention to the activities of 'their pals', even if there are signals of a credible threat. The war with their opponents, instead of war with the threat of political violence, brings the risk of changing Kazakhstan from the safest country in the region into the most troubled one.

Meanwhile, the government represses democratic opposition, because it can be heard, and it hampers the conclusion of the current contracts and distorts the positive image of the Kazakh authorities. But the current political elite does not really care what will happen next.

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