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## **BORDER SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: BEFORE AND AFTER SEPTEMBER 11**

Political changes which took place at the end of the 20th Century made the formation of a principally new regional security system in the Post-Soviet Central Asia necessary. Part of a huge, politically, economically and ideologically homogeneous state, cut off from the external world by the Iron Curtain, the region has gained importance due to its key strategic situation and vast supplies of raw materials. At the same time it has become a sphere of interests for external forces, such as China, the EU, Iran, Russia, Turkey, the USA and others. The combination of internal and external problems, which have arisen in the post-Soviet era require new approaches to safeguard the region's security which has an impact on other regions, as shown by the events of September 11 which have had a global impact on regional security issues and turned Central Asia into an actual or imagined battlefield of the international community.

The borders between the Central Asian States are one of the key factors for regional security. From previously nominal administrative lines dividing Soviet republics, they have become major attributes of state sovereignty, considered in many cases the most important barrier against external threats of both military and non-military origin. In many cases these borders remain permeable for different kinds of illegal transboundary flows. Border security in Central Asia is one of the key dimensions of any strategy aiming at combating terrorism and other non-traditional challenges, especially drug-trafficking and illegal migration. At the same time, the ouster of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan created new possibilities for transboundary cooperation and is regarded as a way to regional security. Taking into account these considerations, the author would like to focus on the changes in border issues that took place after September 11.

## **Before September 11**

Being established by the Russian Empire and later the USSR, the boundaries in Central Asia were determined by a balance of power (as it existed between the USSR and its southern neighbours Iran, Afghanistan, China), or by administrative decisions imposed from above. For the first time, administrative borders between the Soviet Republics of Central Asia were established from 1920 to 1930.

The new administrative division established the ethnic principle of state formation in Central Asia through the creation of the Commission for the Division of Middle Asia. Because of the difficulties of this task, the short terms for its realization, and in many cases of political reasons, the administrative decisions proved to be far from ideal, taking into account the landscape and the historical and ethno-cultural features of the region. For example, landscape and transport routes sometimes compel a traveller to cross a border twice in order to reach a place in the same country. This may happen in the Western and North-western areas of the Russian-Kazakh border, the Northern part of the Uzbek-Turkmen border, in the Kazakh-Uzbek borderland and especially in the Fergana Valley and its contiguous areas. It is more convenient, for example, to go from Tashkent (Uzbekistan) to the valley through the territory of Tajikistan, while the optimum route between the Kyrgyz cities of Osh and Jalalabad passes through Uzbek territory. At the same time, it should be remembered that these dividing lines were intended for administrative-territorial formations within one country, but by no means of future independent states which would base their legitimacy on nationalist ideology.

Less significant changes of borders were made during the entire Soviet period. These changes and transfers of territories from one republic to another were initiated by the central authorities in order to optimize the economic specialization of the border territories according to state, republican or local needs. At local level the lines of delimitation were often a product not of administrative demarcation, but of needs of neighbouring farms, whose borders were frequently marked simply by plough and could be specified by mutual consent.

After the breakdown of the Soviet such contradictions aggravated dramatically. Mutual accusations of neighbouring states concerning the illegal usage of their territory became to be common. The post-Soviet Central Asian borders have a strong legal foundation (Almaty Declaration and the Agreement on the CIS Formation of 1991), making large-scale territorial claims unlikely, but unable to avoid small territorial disputes

Furthermore, transnational criminal groups took advantage of the weakening of control and increasingly used the huge space for illegal transactions. After the USSR collapsed, they built up channels for illegal transit operations (smuggling of drugs, weapons and radioactive substances, illegal migrants and militant extremists). Often, these groups' activities are more effectively and better organised than those of the national security forces and their cooperation more efficient than the one between the states of the region.

Thus, before September 11 the Central Asian states faced very serious transborder security problems. In this respect several key points, shaping the regional agenda, can be stressed.

The withdrawal of the Russian border guards and the establishment of national border guard services were a key point for regional border security before September 11. After the disintegration of the USSR the newly independent states have accepted normative acts regulating their borders' status, and have begun to create border guard and customs services. The process of replacing the Russian border guards was launched at the borders with Iran, Afghanistan and China. Most technical and organizational assistance for the build-up of the Central Asian border troops was rendered by Russia, while some technical and other help was given by the USA and NATO. At the same time, Russian servicemen continue to protect the most difficult areas of the former Soviet borders, especially the border with Afghanistan.

The establishment of national border guard forces has been a very long process which is yet not finished. Also, the processes didn't begin at the same time: in Kazakhstan, the service was set up in 1992 while in

Uzbekistan the process began in January 1998. But in fact, most of the post-Soviet borders were controlled only in 1999. Since then, the border guards have undergone several changes: in Kazakhstan they were temporarily moved out of their subordination to the State Security Committee, but in 1998 this status was restored; in Kyrgyzstan, border security related matters were supervised by the Chief Department for Border Protection in the Ministry of Defence and the Chief Department for Border Control in the National Security Service. In 2003, these structures were replaced by the autonomous Border Guard Service.

The second key point was related to Chinese territorial claims which created tensions in the relations between Beijing and the Central Asian governments (particularly the Kazakh government). The roots of these disputes can be found in the Sino-Russian and Sino-Soviet relations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the armed conflict of 1969. The problem was settled by an agreement regarding the Kazakh-Chinese Border (1994), and additional border agreements about the border (1997, 1998). According to these documents the disputed territories were divided, China obtaining about 43% of the area in forest highlands. In 1997 Russia, Kyrgyzstan, China, and Kazakhstan signed the Agreement on Confidence Strengthening in the Military Sphere and Mutual Armed Forces Reduction in the Region. This agreement stipulated that troops (except border guards) and arms must respect a distance of 100 km from the border. From 2002 to October 2003 border demarcation was accomplished.

The settlement of territorial disputes between China and Kyrgyzstan was achieved by the treaties of 1996 and 1999, according to which Bishkek ceded about 125'000 hectares of Kyrgyz controlled territory. The second agreement was ratified by the Kyrgyz parliament in 2002 despite of mass protests in the South. The potentially most complicated territorial conflict between China and Tajikistan is not solved yet, but significant concessions from Dushanbe are expected by observers.

The third factor were the Taliban, the radical Islamic movement that came to power in Afghanistan in 1996. Because of its military successes and the Islamist attacks on the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

the military cooperation between the Central Asian states and Russia has intensified. The Russian Federation stressed its strategic interests in the region by repeatedly making sharp declarations addressed to the Taliban as well as by joint military exercises, like “The Southern Shield” manoeuvres which were held with the participation of Russia and all states of the region except Turkmenistan. In fact, till 2001 the Russian presence was, at least, one of the main reasons that kept the Taliban from attacking the Central Asian neighbours of Afghanistan.

The fourth crucial point for regional transboundary security was in events of 1999-2000 when multi-national Islamist groupings invaded the territories of Kyrgyzstan and (in 2000) of Uzbekistan. The latter responded by strong security measures including tightening its border regime. It required delimitation of its boundaries at a time when Uzbekistan had territorial problems with almost all its neighbours except Afghanistan which, however, was also a very serious trouble spot. Tashkent tried to solve its border security problem unilaterally and started construction works in contested areas and mining some border zones with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan regarded as vulnerable to the penetration of militant extremists. Such measures provoked conflicts with neighbouring countries and violence against civilians. These events stimulated difficult negotiations between Uzbekistan and its Central Asian post-Soviet neighbours, but so far only the talks with Kazakhstan (2001, 2002) and Turkmenistan (2000) have proven to be successful.

The hardening of border regime in such zones has a sensitive effect on the economic and social situation on the contiguous side and creates serious problems at interstate level. There were already precedents of how the difficulty of transborder transport interaction was used as a means of political or economic pressure on a neighbour party. Such measures, like the hardening of the control over people’s entrance and departure, or over transit passage of transport, were applied by countries (Uzbekistan in particular) dependent on water or power resources of contiguous states (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan correspondingly). On the other hand, Kazakhstan, for example, in response to Uzbekistan’s “gas pressure” stopped in 2000 the transit of Uzbek trains through its territory under the pretext of Tashkent’s debts.

Though the national border services were already created in 1993-94, the real process of arrangement of formerly internal borders began only at the end of the 1990s. In 1997-98 Russia started the process of frontier guards' service creation and strengthening of customs at its border with Kazakhstan, justifying these actions by the necessity of the struggle against smuggling and illegal migration.

A little later, Uzbekistan launched established checkpoints and customs at its borders with other states of Central Asia, restricted passport control and customs examination, and sped up (sometimes by unilateral order) demarcation for the purpose of legitimising the territorial frameworks of its border regime. Moreover, Uzbekistan began to close the passages at its border with Kazakhstan by setting up constructions and it mined some areas of its border with Kyrgyzstan.

Hence, the situation in the matter of border security before September 11 was tense and in many respects unpredictable. The sudden weakening of the security system created favourable conditions for transnational activity of criminal organizations and extremist militants. The main territorial problems combined with the strengthening of extremist forces. These forces were able to lead transborder activity, using the gaps in the national border security systems. Financial resources of the very Central Asian states and help from abroad were insufficient to bring the situation under control. Before September 11, the region was in the periphery of the West's attention, and this circumstance didn't let expect effective support of the US, NATO and the EU.

### **The Changing Security Agenda**

The events of September 11 and the further operation by international forces in Afghanistan were the turning point for the regional security agenda. Since then international terrorism was declared to be "the main challenge" while all other threats have been perceived as less important. Their significance is often connected with the "problem number one". Such perception of the situation is favourable for the most important actors in Central Asian international relations, giving to them additional serious arguments for justifying their interests in the region or repressive

internal political measures. The author supposes that the constructed hierarchy of challenges (with terrorism at the top) does not reflect adequately the existing reality: drug smuggling, for instance, seems to us a much more serious challenge, taking into account its destructive consequences.

In the new conditions border security became one of the corner stones for regional security. Its main priority is the suppression of transborder activity of extremists and criminal groups (especially of narcodealers) that nourishes extremism. Sorting out residuary territorial problems would reduce the risk of instability in the region. The settlement of the status of previously indefinite border areas would bereave extremists of chances to use them as ground for their illegal activity.

It seems that the most dangerous terrorist groups (especially the Islam Movement of Uzbekistan) have weakened and that restrictive security measures were to a certain extent fruitful: among the very serious problems only the events in April 2004 in Uzbekistan can be mentioned. The relative success in this field can hardly be explained by an increase in border security effectiveness: the system still has a lot of disadvantages and is much corrupted. Nevertheless, the strengthening of border security, probably, became one of the factors which helped avoid the repetition of the events in Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000.

One of the most difficult and potentially dangerous territorial problems for Central Asia was settled: the border between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was delimited in 2001 which to some extent was unexpected for observers. According to the agreement between them, 96% of the border was delimited, but the belonging of 4 sections was not defined. The question concerning the border settlements of Baghys and Turkestanets, populated mainly by Kazakhs, was much discussed in Kazakhstan's mass media. The populations of these villages, trying to attract the authorities' attention to their situation, declared the Baghys Kazakh Republic and established their own government. According to the agreement signed on 9 September 2002, Baghys with adjoining territory and the Arnasayskaya dam passed to Kazakhstan (Uzbekistan got an equal sections of land as a compensation); Turkestanets and three

settlements populated by Uzbeks and situated at the border between Kzylorda oblast and the Republic of Karakalpakstan assigned to Uzbekistan. In April 2004, the demarcation of borders was started and is planned to finish in 2008.

Since the end of 2001 Kazakhstan has managed to settle most of all other territorial issues. In 2002 the demarcation of its border with China was started and was finished in October 2003. The Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan delimitation finished in 2001 with the corresponding treaty and went on without serious conflicts. The Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan border delimitation was the easiest one. In Astana on 5 June 2001, the Presidents of both states signed the treaty on delimitation and demarcation of the border, ratified in 2003. The treaty didn't stipulate the delimitation of national sectors in the Caspian Sea, but the principal territorial problems were solved. The delimitation of the Kazakhstan-Russia border, which is the longest continuous land boundary in the world (about 7000 km long), goes on without any serious conflicts and at the turn of 2004 approaches its end.

The border problems of Uzbekistan with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, together with the border issues between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, remain the most difficult regional ones. The solution of these problems are complicated by the different interpretations of the Soviet borders and by the presence of a mixed ethnic population. A positive step toward stabilization was the promise given by Tashkent in 2004 to clear mine fields at the Tajik and Kyrgyz borders. The mining, which proved to be ineffective and caused numerous victims among civilians, is expected to be replaced by more effective measures taken with the assistance of the USA, NATO and the EU.

Delimitation and demarcation led to the fortification of border infrastructure along the lines fixed by international agreements, but in some cases such infrastructure is built along the lines of real control (for instance at the borders between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and Tajikistan). Border fortification which takes place almost everywhere in the region still hasn't solved the problem of illegal transborder operations, first of all drug smuggling and illegal migration.



Its development and provision is too hard for the post-Soviet Central Asian states, but Russia, the US, the EU and other countries and international organizations interested in stability in the region help them.

Russia spends the largest amount of money on the support of the Central Asian border forces in the post-Soviet period. Its main use was covering the maintenance costs of 11 000 border troupes (annual expenses make up 12 million dollars). Besides, Russia trains personnel and supplies equipment. For instance, Russia provided the Kyrgyz-Chinese border with equipment amounting to 700 000 dollars<sup>1</sup>, and essential assistance was rendered for equipping the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border.

The Council of Border Guard Troops Commanders working within the CIS (in which Russia has the key position) is also contributing to the strengthening of border services. It coordinates the cooperation in the working out, production, exploitation, maintenance, and modernization of special equipment, arms and personnel training.

At the same time, Russian border troupes are withdrawn from the region and the national border services are more and more helped by the US, EU and NATO. In 2002, the agreement according to which the control of the Tajik-Chinese border passed to the Tajikistan Committee on State Borders Protection was signed and in June 2004, the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border was planned to be passed under the control of the same department before 2006. Establishing Tajikistan's sovereignty over its borders can be perceived as a positive event, but there is the serious question whether the national border guard forces can effectively counteract huge-scaled drug smuggling and the penetration of armed extremists, given their relative inferiority to Russian forces in technical and financial respects. Meanwhile, Russia annually spent 3 000 tons of fuel on heating for the Russian border detachment situated in the Murgab area in very difficult climatic conditions (the temperature can be 60 degrees below zero for 9 months of a year). The cost of the fuel is several times more than the funds marked out by state budget for the

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<sup>1</sup> *Rossiya okazhet voennuyu pomosch' Kirgizii* (Russia will Render Military Help to Kyrgyzstan). In: *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2 November 2001

total Tajikistan border services support<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, in order to preserve at least the level of border protection provided by Russian troupes, the OSCE, NATO (which supported the withdrawal of Russian troops) and all interested countries and international organisations should increase many times over the financing of the Tajikistan border guard forces, which are still in the process of their formation.

After September 11, American and European programmes for financing border policy in the Central Asian states and for settling border disputes increased. The EXBS programme (US State Department's Export Control and Border Security), working in Central Asia since 2000, is especially important in this light. Due to its activity, the border forces in Central Asia got equipment (cars, radio-locating devices, communication facilities, navigation systems, night-vision devices; prefabricated houses having autonomous supporting systems, devices for customs examination, devices for recognizing radioactive materials and chemical and biological weapons, computers, uniform, medical equipment, patrol vehicles and boats, etc.) and the possibilities for personnel training (e.g. of methods of tracking trespassers, including drug-dealers) The highest expenses within the programmes (equipment costs of \$ 7 million before April 2004 and \$ 6 million more in June of the same year<sup>3</sup>; equipment amounting to 5,8 million is planned to be granted in 2005) have been intended for Uzbekistan; more than \$ 5,8 million (in the period from April 2001 to February 2004) for Kazakhstan<sup>4</sup>; \$ 2,9 million (from June 2002 to March 2004) for Tajikistan.<sup>5</sup>; and several millions of dollars for Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The main purpose of the program is to suppress

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<sup>2</sup> *Otmyne tadzhiksko-kitai'skuyu granitsu bydut ohranyat' tadjikstiyе pograničniki* (Henceforth the Tadzhikistan-China Border Will be Protected by Tajikistani Border Guards). In: Intergovernmental Company "Mir", <http://www.mirtv.ru>, 26.12.2002

<sup>3</sup> *SShA pomogli Uzbekistanu v ohrane granits yesche na \$ 0,5 mln.* (USA again have Helped Uzbekistan in the Field of Border Protection with \$ 0,5 mil.). In: RBC News, [www.rbc.ru](http://www.rbc.ru), 4.05.2004; *SShA peredali Uzbekistanu oborudovanie i tehniku dlia ohrany granits na 6,09 mln. doll.* (USA gave Uzbekistan Equipment and Machinery Costing \$ 6,09 mil.). In: RBC News, [www.rbc.ru](http://www.rbc.ru), 16.06.2004.

<sup>4</sup> Panorama, 2004 (8), [www.panorama.kz](http://www.panorama.kz)

<sup>5</sup> *Posol SShA podaril avtomobili pograničnoy i tamozhennoy sluzhbam Tadjikistana* (The Ambassador of the USA Gifted Motor Vehicles to the Border Guard and Customs Services of Tajikistan). In: CentrAsia, [www.centrasia.ru](http://www.centrasia.ru), 5.03.2004

smuggling of weapons of mass destruction and trespassing of territories of the countries in the region.

A significant help for the development of the Central Asian border guard structures is provided by NATO. First of all, this help covers the training of the personnel of border guard services. For example, the former General Secretary of NATO, George Robertson, during his trip to Dushanbe in September 2003 announced that the Alliance together with the OSCE intended to open a training centre for Central Asian frontier guards in Tajikistan.

A broader range of issues is covered by the help rendered by the EU. In some cases, it is provided for the areas insufficiently covered by other projects. For instance, Tajikistan was given € 12 million by TACIS (that is significantly more than by EXBS) for strengthening its borders<sup>6</sup>. Since 2004 the key project of the European Union in the relevant field is the Central Asian Border Management Programme (BOMCA) essentially intended to improve the work of border guard structures and their direct interaction. Within the programme 15 different projects will be realized; among them are training of personnel and improving the level of special knowledge; collection and exchange of information between border guards, development of corresponding legislative base, work with local communities for “the reinforcement of the long-term effect”, and equipment delivery. Within BOMCA the establishment of joint customs checkpoints and of training academies for border guard forces in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are also planned. It seems to be significant that the programme lays the key stress on the struggle against drug-trafficking<sup>7</sup>.

The toughening of border regimes having taken place throughout the entire region still doesn't allow to solve the problem of illegal

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<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Mukhin, “*OBSE i NATO vydavlivaiut Rossiyu s tadjhiksko-afganskoy granitsy* (OSCE and NATO force Russia from Tajik-Afghan Border)”, Olo.ru, <http://www.olo.ru>, 2.12.2003

<sup>7</sup> *Panorama*, “*ES pristupil k realizatsii novogo proekta po resheniyu pogranychnyh problem stran TsA* (EU Has Started the Project on Central Asian Borders Management)”. 2004 (1), [www.panorama.kz](http://www.panorama.kz)

transboundary operations, first of all of drug-trafficking and illegal migration.

A wide range of possibilities of hiding goods from border control and the transit location of all Central Asian states make them a key part of drug-trafficking routes by which heroin, opium, hashish, marijuana, synthetic drugs are smuggled. There are resources for drugs production throughout Central Asia, including Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (which are among the largest pot producers), but Afghanistan is the main source of heroin, the most dangerous narcotic.

In the 1990s the country became one of the main centres of world drug production and the leader in the production of heroin. At present, Afghanistan produces 75-80% of world opiates<sup>8</sup>. Holding a record in 1999 (4600 tons), opium producers reduced manufacture to 190 tons (in 2000 they produced 3300 tons) because of drought and the Taliban's campaign of fight against drugs planting. However, after the international operation in Afghanistan in 2002, the production volume was completely restored (3400 tons). On the whole, planting of and trade in narcotics became the key industry in the national economy as a result of conflicts and devastation in the last decades. According to the UN Secretary-General Deputy Special Representative in Afghanistan N. Fisher, the fight against poppy planting will be won no earlier than in 5 or 10 years<sup>9</sup>.

There are several transport routes of opium. On the way (in Afghanistan and abroad), it is converted to heroin. The main routes are the Balkan route (through Iran or Pakistan to port Karachi and then by sea to Turkey, the Balkan countries and after that to Southern and Central Europe and to The Netherlands) and the Northern route (or "the Silk route"). The latter includes routes crossing borders between Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics. One of them passes through Tajikistan,

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<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (booklet). N.Y., 2004

<sup>9</sup> Cit. by: Azhdar Kurtov, "Narkobiznes v Tsentral'noy Azii: istoriya bolezni i puti izlecheniya (Narco-business in Central Asia: the Case History and the Ways of its Treatment)", Analiticheskoye obozreniye, Almaty, 2004 (1): 21

Kyrgyzstan and the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley. After that most of the opiates are smuggled through the territory of Kazakhstan to Russia (being itself one of the largest heroin markets) and further to Eastern Europe, Germany and The Netherlands. The other branches of the Northern route pass through the Afghan-Uzbek border and Kazakhstan, or through the Afghan-Turkmen border and Kazakhstan/Azerbaijan, in most cases then running through Russia or going a roundabout way, particularly through Turkey. The “Silk route” attracts narcodealers because of permeable borders between the CIS states. One more possible reason is that they have more chances to establish transborder tribal and ethnic contacts (for instance between the representatives of ethnic groups living in Northern Afghanistan and in the CIS states – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and other states of the former USSR). The economic crisis in the post-Soviet states caused economy stagnation, growth of economic shadow sectors and pauperisation of the population. More and more people start working in drug smuggling and corruption in different fields increases. According to many viewpoints, the degree of amalgamation between corrupted state structures and narco-business is especially high in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

More and more experts and state officials in Russia, Central Asia and other countries discomposedly speak of the growing importance of the Northern route. During the last decade opiates consumption in post-Soviet Central Asia increased by 6 times, this is the highest rate in the world. About 1% of population at the age of 15 and more are drug addicts. This index is 3 times as big as in Europe. According to statistical data on opiates consumption, a sudden rise was registered in the Central Asian countries bordering on Afghanistan: Iran, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan<sup>10</sup>. According to official statistics the largest proportion of opiates consumers in the total population live in Iran (2,8%), Kyrgyzstan (2,3%) Kazakhstan (1,5%), Tajikistan (1,3%); while in Russia this share is 2,1%<sup>11</sup>. It should be noted that this data is not always complete and accurate, in many cases the total number of consumers is estimated to be several times as big as than according to official statistical data.

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<sup>10</sup> World Drug Report 2004 (Draft). Multimedia version. N.Y.: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004: 21-22

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 341, 342

Global conjuncture of cannabis drugs turnover is different. They are relatively cheaper (in the states of CIS they cost from 0.3 to 0.4 dollars per gramme)<sup>12</sup>, this is why larger lots of the product are transported across the border and therefore, the risk is higher. The geographic zone where cannabis grows wild or can be planted is vaster and transport routes are shorter than the ones of opiates. In this case, the Middle East and Central Asia don't influence the global market, providing only a small part of global supply. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are themselves large-scale producers of cannabis drugs, the valley of the river Tchu (Shu) is known for especially big cannabis fields. According to an UN research, hashish production in the Kazakh part of the valley amounted to 53 tons on 2500 hectares, and in Kyrgyzstan to 24 tons on 770 hectares in 1998<sup>13</sup>. Naturally, the main cannabis routes originate in the mentioned countries. In 2002, 30 tons of cannabis were detained in Russia, 17 tons in Kazakhstan, 2,5 tons in Kyrgyzstan, 1 in Tajikistan, 0.4 in Uzbekistan<sup>14</sup>. The number of cannabis consumers in Russia and Central Asia (with the exception of Uzbekistan) according to official data is stable, but the rate is much higher than of opiates addicts (in Russia 3,9% in 1999)<sup>15</sup>.

Drugs are not the only kind of smuggling across Central Asian borders. According to a high-standing representative of the Russian Customs Service, about 30% of the goods transported to Russia from Kazakhstan is smuggled<sup>16</sup>; among them are scrap metal, woodworking of industrial production, building materials, agricultural goods, food, spirit, tipples, mass consumption goods, combustive-lubricating materials. Car spare parts are also smuggled to Russia; while food, illegally produced tipples and mass consumption goods are trafficked in return. Raw materials, metallurgic output, natural stuff (including horns and other parts of animals, including rare species) are smuggled to China from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan while the production of the Chinese light industry is illegally delivered in return. Cattle, fish, mass consumption goods are

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 328,329

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 111, 346

<sup>16</sup> *Novye Izvestiya*, "Tret' tovarov, postupayuschih iz Kazahstana v Rossiyu, - kontrabanda (One Third of Goods Coming from Kazakhstan to Russia is a Contraband)", 4 December 2003

smuggled from neighbouring countries to Turkmenistan; corn and petrol to Kyrgyzstan, base metals and petrol to Uzbekistan. Most of the contraband operations are transit. For instance, Kazakhstan's travel facilities are used for transporting Chinese goods to Russia, because the access for Russian lorries to China is limited. There are also cases of smuggling of dangerous items (arms and military equipment) and substances (radioactive materials).

The relative permeability of the Central Asian borders, the difficult economic situation, disparities between prices in contiguous countries, and poverty in the border areas are factors favouring contraband operations of different kinds including drugs, arms and radioactive materials smuggling. Small-scale smuggling is often the main source of income for the populations of some border areas while illegal groups carry on well-organized and rather profitable business. Contraband operations deprive the state of a substantial part of its income and seriously damage some sectors of the national economies.

Drastic degradation of the social-economic situation, threats to life and other basic human rights as a result of ethnic conflicts and official policies infringing upon essential personal or group interests intensify migration processes in Central Asia. The countries of the region are very vulnerable to illegal penetration in their territories for different kinds of purposes: settling, transit migration, criminal operations, smuggling, and participation in the activities of illegal extremist groups and so on. In some border areas, illegal crossings committed by people engaged in transboundary economic operations are usual. Such cases particularly often occur in the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan borderland, where the boundary cuts some settlements. Some cases of trespassing are caused by local economic needs (cattle pasture, plants collecting etc).

Most of illegal border crossings are committed by labour migrants who go to "richer" countries especially to Kazakhstan and further – to Russia and the EU. Since 2000, the channels of illegal migration from South and East Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), and even from African countries across the borders of China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, have been developing intensively. This

kind of migration is a well-organized business of transnational criminal groups, using defects in national legislation and in the system of Kazakhstan's international cooperation with the neighbouring countries. In particular, many illegal migrants go through a staging point (for instance from Sri Lanka through The United Arab Emirates), enter the country from a state (in particular, from Kyrgyzstan) having no visa regime with Kazakhstan, and then try to penetrate to Russia and the countries of the EU. The poorly guarded Kyrgyz-Kazakh border can be crossed by train, by car (with help of inhabitants), or even on foot. Illegal migration from Asian states is fairly active in the Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan borderland. Most of the Chinese citizens come to Kazakhstan legally, but according to Kazakhstan's Border Guard Service officials the threat of illegal mass migration across the Chinese boundary is very serious<sup>17</sup>.

The flow of illegal labour migrants from the CIS countries is much stronger. Kazakhstani experts suppose that about 50 000 illegal migrants from the neighbouring country work in Almaty and Jambyl oblasts while Kyrgyzstan's experts estimate their number at 10 000 people.<sup>18</sup> Many migrants work in Southern Kazakhstan like slaves, being punished by their masters for any attempt to escape. Women are removed for sexual exploitation and smuggled across the Kyrgyzstan border to Kazakhstan and further to Russia. High salaries in Kazakhstan attract illegal migrants from the neighbouring provinces of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan: for instance, Turkmen workers try to penetrate into Mangistau oblast while thousands of illegal Uzbek labour migrants work in Kazakhstan's southern regions<sup>19</sup>.

The efficiency of the fight against smuggling is reduced by corruption and insufficient coordination between the actions of the contiguous states' customs services. As a result, there are many cases like the

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<sup>17</sup> M. Kirzhak, "Rodina-mat' ne dast (Motherland won't allow to do ...)", *Ekspress-K* 95 (7 June 2000)

<sup>18</sup> Sadovskaya

<sup>19</sup> Igor Rotar, "Granitsa mezhdru Kazahstanom i Uzbekistanom prohodit po chastnym domam (The Border between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan Passes through Private Households)", *Novye Izvestiya*, 27 August 2003



transport of cargo in guise of another one or the omission of the declaration of some kinds of goods.

The problem of corruption is one of the most serious challenges. Corruption causes state budget deficiency, obstacles for normal transboundary communication, creates prerequisites for penetration of criminals and illegal migrants to the country. In some cases corruption is a result of unjustified border regime restrictions and, at the same time, the mechanism helping to keep an acceptable level of transboundary communication for local population and small business.

Corruption prospers at all Central Asian borders, especially in the areas having active transboundary communication. It can be illustrated by the statement of Nursultan Nazarbayev (Kazakhstan) who in March of 2002 criticized the work of the Customs Service at Kazakh-Chinese border, declaring that “criminals overwhelmed state structures”<sup>20</sup>.

Among the border areas most infected by corruption are the boundary between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (and in particular the area of the settlement and the checkpoint of Zhibek Zholy), and between Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan in the area of Osh etc.. High density and economic activity of the borderland’s population, combined with unjustified restrictions in the border regime, hurt the interests of the local inhabitants whose key source of income consists in transboundary activities. In such conditions, the relations of corruption with the representatives of the border guard and customs services is often the sole way to carry on cross-border business. According to numerous evidences, border guard and customs officers of both neighbouring countries have considerable income from conniving at mass illegal

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<sup>20</sup> *Kazahstanskii’ institut strategicheskikh issledovanii’*, (29 March 2002), “V Astane sostoyalos’ rasshirennoye zasedaniya rukovoditelei’ pravoohranitel’nyh organov s uchastiyem Prezidenta stany (The Broadened Meeting of the Heads of Law-enforcement Bodies with Participation of the President of the Country Took Place in Astana)”, [www.kisi.kz/Parts/News/office\\_news/o2002/o03/03-29-02/o03-29-1.htm](http://www.kisi.kz/Parts/News/office_news/o2002/o03/03-29-02/o03-29-1.htm)

border crossings. The numerous cases of blackmail under threats of punishment for petty or invented infringements are also mentioned<sup>21</sup>.

In order to solve this problem, the Central Asian countries took measures showing results. These results are particularly evident in Kazakhstan where in 2004 the customs dues amounted 27% of the country's budget revenue<sup>22</sup>. But the conditions generating relations of corruption (including insufficient transparency of the rules of the border regime, in some cases its unjustified rigidity, the low salaries in controlling bodies etc.) still exist in every country of the region.

The second aspect of Central Asian transborder security is the problem of normal transboundary communication. Unfortunately, the toughening of the border regimes of all countries in the region causes higher barriers for economic structures and individuals involved in transboundary interaction. For the states in the region, a border regime with superfluously barriers can cause losses of state profit, a decrease of its citizens' loyalty, loss in the guests' confidence, and even a destabilization of the situation in the border areas. According to some estimates, prolonged closing of the border can cause a reduplication of prices of Chinese mass consumption goods while the fall of economic activity at Uzbek-Kazakh border can reduce Kazakhstan's national income by up to 3,5 billion dollars a year<sup>23</sup>. Meanwhile, the duration of the border guard and customs inspections don't meet the requirements accepted in the EU and in some other countries, and the procedures of Central Asian border crossings by motorised transport can last 5 days<sup>24</sup> and even more.

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<sup>21</sup> *Internet-gazeta "Navigator", "Vymogatel'stvo na kazahskoi' tamozhne stalo obychnym yavleniyem. Pis'ma chitateley (Blackmails has Become Usual at Kazakhstan's Custom-houses. Letters from the Readers)", <http://www.navi.kz/articles/?artid=3496>, 27 May 2003*

<sup>22</sup> Larissa Mostovaya, "*Tamozhnya ob'edinyayetsya (The Custom Service is been Uniting)*", *Izvestiya Kazahstan*, 15 June 2004

<sup>23</sup> Aleksei Bantsykin, "*Obstanovka na kazahstansko-uzbekistanskoy granitse spokojnaya (The Situation at Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan Border is Quiet)*", *NOMAD*, [www.nomad.su/?a=3-200301230017](http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200301230017)

<sup>24</sup> *Regionalnoye ekonomicheskoye sotrudnichestvo po Afganistanu: Tsentral'naya Aziya, Iran I Afganistan. Bishkek, Kyrgyzskaya Respublika, 10-12 maya 2004, "Tranzitnaya i transportnaya struktura Afganistana (Transit and Transport Structures of Afghanistan)", [www.iimp.kz/produkt/pdf/10\\_mai.pdf](http://www.iimp.kz/produkt/pdf/10_mai.pdf): 4*

From time to time the countries of the region restrict their border regimes for reasons of economic, political, social, sanitary, and epidemiological kinds. In 2000, Turkmenistan introduced visas for the citizens of the post-Soviet states making partial concession (the right of stay for 5 days without a visa) to the citizens of border areas; in 2004 Turkmenistan started to build a barbed-wire fence along its border. Uzbekistan periodically restricts the order of entrance and importation of goods from Kazakhstan and other neighbours. Many experts suppose that Uzbekistan tries to put political and economic pressure on the neighbouring country. Such action was made under the pretext of fighting against plagues and cholera, but according to an unofficial version the real reason was the prevention of currency drain for purchasing cheaper goods in Kazakhstan. The passport control at the border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was restricted repeatedly because of an increase in illegal migration; in spring 2003 the borders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with China were closed because of SARS. After terrorist actions in Uzbekistan in March 2004 Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan restricted the entrance regimes from their neighbouring countries.

Many incidents involving the use of arms by frontier guards and police forces at Uzbekistan's borders were provoked by the fact that the contemporary regime of admittance (there are 29 check-points) and import of goods doesn't meet transboundary communication needs. During 9 months in 2003, Kazakhstan's frontier guards registered 1127 cases of trespassing by citizens of the contiguous state<sup>25</sup>. Such cases often take place in the areas having a complex ethnic composition, close relative ties between the populations in the border areas and even transboundary settlements.

Meanwhile, the overthrow of Taliban regime has potentially opened broad possibilities for transboundary transport communication with Afghanistan and South Asian countries. Border infrastructure has been developed at the Uzbek-Afghan and the Tajik-Afghan boundaries; the

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<sup>25</sup> Nikolay Zhorov, "*Vystrely na granitse* (Shots at the Border)", *Argumenty i Fakty Kazahstan*, 24 September 2003

bridges across the Panj River are constructed. The corresponding projects are financed both by Western countries and organisations (especially by the USA and the EU) and from other sources. For example, in 2002 the Aga Khan Foundation declared its decision to finance the construction of five bridges<sup>26</sup>. It is believed that the development of transboundary cooperation will become one of the main conditions for regional security and probably will prove more effective than measures on tightening the border regimes.

## Conclusion

After September 11 and related events in Afghanistan, the agenda of regional transboundary security has changed essentially. The region has turned out to be in the cynosure of the USA and the EU and the problem of militant extremists' transborder activity has become one of the most actual ones. Central Asian countries have begun to receive significant help (comparable to Russian one) for the strengthening of their border security forces which together with some other factors led to the diminishing of the Russian border guards' presence in Tajikistan – the key country for regional border security. The growing attention of international community has influenced on the diminishing of border problems' acuteness and the potentially most dangerous of these problems which the delimitation of Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan border, was resolved. The new prospects for transboundary cooperation, including opening of transport communication with South Asian countries, have been arisen.

However, many serious questions are still unsolved. Among them are territorial problems between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; weak material and personell resources of the regional countries' border guard forces (in this light the weakening of the Tajik-Afghan border protection is of special anxiety) and the high level of corruption within them; rigid border regimes and the existing practices of their strengthening in order to put pressure on neighbouring countries. The

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<sup>26</sup> *CentrAsia.ru*, “*Tadzhiksko-afganskaya granitsa: Aga Han stroit pyat' mostov cherez reku Piandzh* (Tajikistan-Afghanistan border: Aga Khan Builds Five Bridges through the River of Panj)”, <http://www.CentrAsia.Ru/newsA.php4?st=1016314620>

main issue is an unprecedented growth in drug-trafficking as the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has created favourable conditions for producing drugs while the measures for their reduction are still ineffective. It seems that even the strengthening of border regimes could not bring sufficient effect as according to relevant international experience it may provide suppression of smuggling only up to 10%.

The solution of these and other related problems depends on many factors among which are not only military measures and measures taken by the police, but also internal socio-economic and political reforms as well as the development of cross-border cooperation. Central Asian countries themselves have very limited resources to solve their border problems while the financial and technical resources of the border control structures are weak and the required expenses are not feasible for the national budgets. Therefore, the countries of the region are hardly able to carry out their border policy effectively without close cooperation with the neighbouring countries and foreign organisational and technical assistance. The success of such policies, which could require long-term efforts, would be a very important one for the regional stability in Central Asia and the development of effective Euro-Asian transnational links.

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