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(this English version is abridged, the Russian version is unabridged and covers the complete reports by Az-P sources)

Tajikistan:

Special topic: How stable is Rakhmon's power?

Dushanbe, 06.03.2008 (Az-P): In the nearest future staff changes within the Tajik administration are most likely. According to our sources inside the Presidential circles the needed papers were already prepared, some of them even adopted. However, final decisions concerning some persons inside the administration have not been made yet. Azia Prime informations state that the mayor of Dushanbe M. Ubajdullaev will be dismissed and replaced by A. Miraliev, head of the Presidential Office; meanwhile, Ubajdullaev will stay in power as Chairman of the Higher Chamber of the Tajik Parliament; A. Rakhmon will be appointed new head of the Presidential Office, who currently serves as Minister for Education. His post will be passed over to N. Salimov, Chancellor of Khodjant University. The present General Prosecutor B. Bobokhonov will be appointed new Human Rights Omdudsman, whereas Sh. Salimov, current head of the State Agency for Financial Control and Anti-Corruption. As new head of the Home Ministry, M. Salikhov should be replaced by the Chairman of the Justice Council, Sh. Shoev. Meanwhile, a new post is not planned to be offered to Salikhov. According to our sources, he fell out of favour with the Tajik President; probably it has something to do with the fact that President Rakhmon was informed about Salikhov's private assets (around 50 million US-\$) some months ago, that he did not share with the President: „His meanness made the President very angry!“.

Commentary: The support of the President's policy by the elite of Dangana, the home of Rakhmon, has decreased in the recent past. Analysts state that the Presidential surrounding is beginning to understand that the economical and social crisis cannot go on without any end; the leading members of the Dangana-Clan are aware of the fact that President Rakhmon sooner or later

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has to be replaced by a leader with financial and economic knowledge; in addition those circles are not willing to lose their influence and power in the country. Therefore, this group is not happy with the possible successors Salikhov (from the Kurgan-Tube region) and Ubajdullaev, who has direct support from the Gissar region. Sadullaev, though part of the Dangana-Clan, is also not backed by this group. Azia-Prime analysts say that the elite from Dangana probably would favour Miraliev, who could be backed by Sadullaev as well, because he does not want to take the risk to lose his assets.

Dushanbe, 27.02.2008 (Az-P): The relations between Rakhmon and the Kremlin are deteriorating. During the unofficial CIS-summit on February 21 in Moscow President Rakhmon was not welcomed in a warm atmosphere; his meeting with Russian President Putin was very short and according to our sources cold. During his discussion with Rakhmon, Putin said that he was not happy with Tajikistan's efforts towards Iran and other Islamic and Arab countries. In addition Russia would not be pleased with the Tajik-Indian negotiations concerning the Indian military presence at the airport just 20 km outside Dushanbe. Also, Rakhmon's attempts finding new investors for finalizing the construction of Rogun and other projects in Tajikistan provides some serious irritations in Russia.

Addition: According to our informations and analysis in Tajikistan's powerful circles, the Kremlin is also looking for possible successors as new President; it seems that the Kremlin is supporting three candidates: M. Ubajdullaev, M. Salikhov and the brother-in-law of President Rakhmon K. Sadullaev. Advisors of the Tajik President assume that Moscow is making the most out of the conflicts between Rakhmon, Ubajdullaev and Salikhov; obviously Rakhmon was convinced to delay the planned dismissal of Ubajdullaev. Salikhov has close connections to leading Russian business circles. According to one Az-P source, which still has to be checked, Russian military planes with 700 members of a special force arrived in Dushanbe, while President Rakhmon left the country on February 10 for a state visit in Iran. Our source reported that after the events on February 2 in Garm the Russian Administration become worried about the development in Tajikistan. The special unit of the Russian Army was not sent to Dushanbe in order to support the Tajik Army in the fight against the united Tajik opposition (OTO), but to take control over the country in the case of a destabilization during President Rakhmon's leave. The whole operations was initialized by the Iranian President, who called President Putin. Informations from Dushanbe assume that in the case of a

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coup d'état the Kremlin would support any person who would try to challenge the current President on condition that this person is willing to support Russian interests in Tajikistan. Inside the political elite in the country the opinion is increasing that President Rakhmon's time as a ruler has come to an end, however underlining the fact at the same time that no powerful successor entered the political stage who could be in the position to realize a changeover of power in Tajikistan.

Dushanbe, 17.03.2008 (Az-P): Protests against the arbitrariness of legal authorities took place in Khorog. Approximately 300 people gathered in front of the local administration building. Background of the discontent was the beating-up of two members of the local prosecutor's office on March 14 in Roshtkalinsk, a district which should belong to the autonomous region of Gorny Badakhshan (GBAO), who in the past extorted the local population. The demonstrators demanded the return of six villages in the Darvas region (GBAO), which after a decree by the Upper Chamber of the Tajik Parliament became part of the Tavildarinsk district; according to the Tajik constitution the Parliament has no legal right to change the borders of GBAO without permission by its local parliament. The situation in Khorog stays tense.

Special topic: The relation between President Rakhmon and the field commanders of Garm; danger of an escalation.

The death of the OMON-Commander in Garm (see our News Digest No.2, 2008) underlines the unstable relations between the President and the field commanders of OTO, especially in Garm. The Tajik General Prosecutor Bobokhonov issued a statement on January 14, that „those are in the prisons of the country, who committed crimes as coup d'état, and murder.“ this statement was received by the opposition as an open attack. Meanwhile, according to our sources inside the Tajik administration, President Rakhmon gave the order to replace all commanders of border police at the frontier to Afghanistan. Those new officials will not be members of the elite in Garm, but will be recruited from the region of Leninabad; in practical terms, such a power means the complete control over drug traffic, smuggling of weapons and precious stones. The decree by the President caused a counter-reaction by the field commanders of OTO: refusal to obey orders, looting on the streets of the region. Parts of units under Mullah Abdullo and M. Nizomov already went armed into the mountains of the Tajik-Afghan border region in order to start guerrilla warfare. Meanwhile, the extreme temperatures and

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snow have increased the bad situation of the inhabitants in this region; the interruption of food and energy was understood by them as a revenge of the elite from Leninabad. The majority of people in the Garm region is sure that the Government will start military actions against them as soon as the temperatures will get warmer. Therefore, former fighters of the opposition together with supporters in the society already prepare for armed actions.

Turkmenistan:

Main topic: The situation of political prisoners and arrested officials, who were jailed under Niyazov

Ashkhabad, 19.03.2008 (Az-P): According to our sources inside the Turkmen security, every jail and camp in Turkmenistan has special lists of prisoners. However, neither Shikhmuradov nor Sadjaev as the best known political prisoners are listed in one of those lists. The so-called „main prisoners“ are all located in prisons near the city of Turkmenbashi. It was also mentioned that the former Vice Prime Minister Sadjaev, who used to control the judicial system and the MNB under Niyazov, had a stroke two years ago. Since today his relatives do not have any information about him; several times they sent a request to the authorities for a visit or to get the permission of sending him some goods, but every attempt was ignored.

Commentary: After becoming President of Turkmenistan, Berdymukhamedov made the promise to review the judicial system of Niyazov. He made this promise in public, but never made any comments on political prisoners. Until today, only some former local officials were released under several amnesties, who were arrested shortly before Niyazov died. Under those, probably E. Gurbanmuradov (former curator of the Turkmen oil and gas industry), his wife and relatives were the most relevant person, who have been released. The most-likely reason for the amnesty was that Berdymukhamedov only became part of the ruling elite with the support of Gurbanmuradov. According to our sources, the President gave the order to make the list of other arrested officials not public; in addition a release of those was not allowed. During the Day of Independance and the Day of the National Flag some officials of the judiciary and assistants of the prosecutor's office were released. At the same time there are informations that the legal

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authorities received the order to review the criminal cases against those released officials again, most likely to find „evidence“ for a new arrest.

Addition: After inquiries by ETG and Az-P, several sources gave us the information concerning the current situation of political prisoners in Turkmenistan:

1. Since Berdymukhamedov came into power as President of Turkmenistan, the result of several amnesties was the release of nearly 10.000 prisoners in total, under those were only eleven political prisoners. It is important to know that the absolute majority of the political prisoners, under them B. Shikhmuradov, were sentenced under the criminal law.
2. On the occasion of the Day of the National Flag on December 19, the President signed a decree concerning a general amnesty; according to this order 1.269 persons were released from prison or banishment, under those also foreign citizens. So-called „humpback cells“, where the cell is not higher than 140 cm, are still in use; those cells were built especially for political prisoners. According to our source in Turkmenistan, already under Niyazov's presidency an order was given that prisoners in those „humpback prisons“ had to be treated with „the strongest hand: They have to be undernourished, no medical treatment.“ In fact this decree meant the slow death for the arrested. This decree is still in practical use and according to unproved sources 25 political prisoners, who were sentenced after the „November Event“, died in those blocks already.
3. According to a source inside the Turkmen Home Ministry until January 2008 B. Shikhmuradov and other political prisoners close to him were located in the special political prison AG-D/5 „Ovodan Depe“ in the desert 70 km north of Ashkhabad, some of them meanwhile were transferred to the prison BL-K/4 „Akdash“; it is impossible to state the correct number and names of those.

Commentary: The future destiny of the political prisoners is dependent on several factors. According to some persons inside the Presidential Palace the most important one is probably the psychological factor: an amnesty of political prisoners „could be interpreted in the wrong way, not only by the the Turkmen people, but also by the global community and it could damage the reputation of the country seriously“, said the President himself. It can be assumed that during the Day of the Constitution on May 18 and the Day of Independence on November 27 a few political prisoners will be released, in

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order to show a sign to the West that the Turkmen Administration is willing to „stay on course towards liberalization of the country“ and, more practically, to receive some credits from Western countries. But there are also internal considerations: a possible release of figures like Shikhmuradov and his close allies „would not be very clever“, said Berdymukhamedov in a private discussion. „Because they were arrested by order of the Great Turkmenbashi and fear is the best tool in the fight against our enemies.“

Beside those aspects, a possible release is unlikely because of legal barriers: according to the „Law of the annual amnesty during Gydyr Gidjesi“ (the 27. night of Ramazan), only prisoners will be released, who committed minor crimes; murderers, rapists, hostage-takers, drug-smugglers, people who tried to kill the head of state, supported corruption and were responsible for crimes against the state will not be pardoned.

Interior Policy:

Ashkhabad, 02.03.2008 (Az-P): In several parts of Turkmenistan unrests of people were observed. People set petrol stations on fire, protesting against governmental plans to increase the price for petrol. According to opinions inside the Home Ministry such unrests never accured in the past; a strong censorship of the mass media is preventing an objective picture of the civil protest. Meanwhile, the Turkmen President underscores his order to increase the price for petrol from 16 cent (€) up to 60 cent (€), while saying that still 120 liters per month should be given free of charge to Turkmen drivers.

Ashkhabad, 02.03.2008 (Az-P): Sources inside the Turkmen Government confirm that the President gave the order to a slow and quiet disappearance of Niyazov's portraits in the country. Other sources report that Turkmenbashi's portraits are only replaced by portraits of the new President and that he himself gave the order that his portrait should only be present inside buildings, but not outside.

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