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Kazakhstan Continues Supporting Kyrgyz Neighbours in Times of Instability

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Kazakhstan Continues Supporting Kyrgyz Neighbours in Times of Instability



The Kordai border crossing point, a major one on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, was among three land border crossings that were reopened on May 20 by the agreement of the two sides.

Photo by Vesti.kz

Kazakhstan continues extending a helping arm to Kyrgyzstan as it reopened the border between the two states, which was closed for security reasons after April 6-7 riots in the neighbouring country. President Nazarbayev made the decision in response to appeals from the Interim Government and citizens of Kyrgyzstan and in line with Kazakhstan's policy of assistance in restoring political stability and ensuring socioeconomic normalization there. Border, customs, and migration control, however, is tighter than usual due to the lack of stability in the Kyrgyz Republic, which was again demonstrated by the latest violence on May 19 in south Kyrgyzstan.

On May 19, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry issued the following statement:

“Kazakhstan puts a special value on the high level of relations with the brotherly nation of Kyrgyzstan, which are based on mutual respect and good-neighbourly relations, centuries-old traditions of friendship, as well as linguistic and cultural proximity.

From the first days of the tragic events in the Kyrgyz Republic in April 2010 Kazakhstan has provided assistance and support to the brotherly nation both on the bilateral basis and as the OSCE chair country.

Serious problems with ensuring stability, law and order in the neighbouring state negatively affected security situation and crime rate in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Therefore, the country's leadership was forced to introduce temporary restrictions on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz state border as of April 6.

Unfortunately, the situation in the Kyrgyz Republic is far from complete normalization and stabilization.

Taking into account the difficult socio-economic situation in Kyrgyzstan and numerous appeals of citizens of the friendly country, however, the President of Kazakhstan gave instructions to the Government to remove temporary restrictions on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz interstate border entry points of “Kordai”, “Syptay batyr”, and “Aisha Bibi” starting on May 20.

The entry points will allow international transit traffic, cargo and passenger transportations, the passing of persons, food, medical products, fuel and lubricants, and agricultural products.

At the same time, the boundary, customs and migration control will be tightened in order to ensure timely neutralization of possible challenges and threats.

We call on the Interim government of Kyrgyzstan to ensure speedy stabilization of the situation, restore the rule of law and seek solutions of problems of the country’s population.”

On May 2,0 the Interim government of Kyrgyzstan issued a following statement from Roza Otunbayeva, its chairperson and the country’s newly-appointed interim President, which reads: “Kazakhstan’s border with Kyrgyzstan was reopened thanks to a political will of President Nazarbayev. Now the Kyrgyz economy is going to recover, as trade flows would be restored, and we hope to return to the previously normal economic parameters.”

The Kyrgyz Interim government’s Deputy Chairperson Omurbek Tekebayev admitted that Kazakhstan was forced to close its border with Kyrgyzstan a few weeks ago due to legitimate security concerns. Commending Nazarbayev’s decision to reopen the border, he said that “from now on citizens of our two brotherly nations can continue a mutually advantageous cultural and economic collaboration”. He also noted the positive impact of the Kazakh leader’s appointment of Bulat Utemuratov as his Special Representative on cooperation with Kyrgyzstan.

“We are glad that the intensive talks between representatives of the Interim government of Kyrgyzstan and the leadership of Kazakhstan bore fruit... On its own behalf, the Interim government would take every possible effort to prevent any possible obstructions for the development of bilateral relations in the future”, Tekebayev concluded.

Having reopened the border, Kazakhstan, however, cannot ignore the ongoing instability in the neighbouring country, and urges Kyrgyzstan’s Interim government and its entire people to seek peaceful solutions for internal conflicts and controversies within the rule of law.

As new cases of violence erupted on May 19 in asouth Kyrgyzstan, which led to two deaths and dozens of injuries, the Kazakh OSCE chairmanship issued a statement calling on all clashing sides for calm. The statement reads as follows.

“The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Kazakhstan’s Secretary of State and Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev, expressed deep concern today about the tragic events in Kyrgyzstan’s southern Jalal-Abad region, which again led to casualties.

Saudabayev made the following statement: “I urge all parties to refrain from violence, to do everything possible to avoid further confrontation and to solve problems on a basis of tolerance and compromise. Conflicts on ethnic grounds are especially unacceptable. Overcoming the crisis in Kyrgyzstan requires that public safety, rule of law, peace and stability be ensured.

Kazakhstan’s OSCE Chairmanship has made every effort to help Kyrgyzstan resolve its crisis since it began. Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev, taking into account the difficult socio-economic situation in Kyrgyzstan, has decided that the temporary restrictions on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz state border that were introduced on 6 April because of the crisis shall be lifted as of tomorrow, May 20.

The OSCE Centre in Bishkek actively participates in solving problems both in the north and in the south and is constantly monitoring the situation.

In addition to myself, OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Joao Soares, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek and other OSCE officials have visited Kyrgyzstan recently to provide assistance in settling the situation in the country.

In a telephone conversation today with the head of Kyrgyzstan’s interim government, Roza Otunbayeva, I expressed our concern about the continued unrest and reiterated the readiness of the

OSCE, its Centre in Bishkek and its institutions to provide support to Kyrgyzstan in overcoming the crisis as soon as possible, and to support the country's further constitutional development."

Kazakhstan Hopes to Use OSCE Experience in Chairing OIC in 2011



Kanat Saudabayev poses along his colleagues for a family photo in Tajik national costumes at the OIC Foreign Ministers Council in Dushanbe (May 19-20, 2010).

Photo by the Foreign Ministry

Foreign ministers from the Islamic world gathered in Dushanbe May 18-19 for the 37th annual conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Active participation of the Kazakh delegation led by Secretary of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs Kanat Saudabayev once again confirmed Kazakhstan's willingness to closely cooperate with OIC and its readiness to share its experience accumulated from the OSCE's chairmanship for the progress.

Addressing his fellow ministers on the conference's first day, Saudabayev said the past

decade has been a period of hardship for the Islamic world, which has become a target for the destructive forces. The results of this policy are obvious: the war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, the stagnation of the Middle East settlement, internal conflicts, the growth of anti-Islamic sentiment and attempts to restrict the rights of Muslims in some parts of the world.

Saudabayev called upon the OIC members "to respond to these challenges by creating a new security paradigm based on principles of openness, mutual respect, tolerance and understanding".

Kazakhstan in this regard can serve as a good example for developing nations. There are representatives of more than 130 ethnic groups and 46 religious denominations living in peace and harmony in Kazakhstan. The policy of intercultural dialogue is actively promoted by President Nursultan Nazarbayev both at domestic and international levels. Today its implementation is underway within the OSCE as well which opens up new opportunities for expanding the dialogue between the international structures and the Islamic world, in particular, the OIC.

According to the Kazakh Foreign Minister, it is high time "to ensure full cooperation between the two authoritative bodies such as the OSCE and the OIC", which are in fact the world's two largest regional organizations with 56 and 57 member states in each.

Topical issues of security and confidence-building measures in Asia are also discussed in the framework of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Its third summit meeting in Istanbul on June 8 is to gather leaders of 22 member and 10 observer states.

Saudabayev thanked OIC members for their active participation and support for the CICA, and invited the Organization to join the CICA as an Observer.

Speaking of the importance of Central Asia's geo-strategic position, Saudabayev touched upon the tragic events in the Kyrgyz Republic and noted Kazakhstan's role in resolving the conflict.

As a result of joint efforts of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev and with the active mediation of the OSCE, the UN and the EU, the Kazakh OSCE chairmanship prevented the escalation of violence and averted a civil war in Kyrgyzstan, Saudabayev stressed.

Kazakhstan is also very much involved in the stabilization of Afghanistan by implementing humanitarian programs aimed at economic recovery of the country, and to this end urges both OSCE and OIC member states to do more in providing humanitarian assistance toward full-scale restoration of peaceful life in Afghanistan.

Saudabayev stressed that some OIC countries need a systemic assistance and called upon the OIC states to develop a long-term program of economic and financial assistance to the least developed countries in the region.

The three-day meeting brings together delegations from the 57 member countries of the OIC as well as Observer States, representatives of authoritative international organizations, heads of the OIC institutions such as the Islamic Development Bank, ISESCO and others.

The forum's agenda was defined by numerous contemporary challenges and threats to the wellbeing of Muslim-majority countries. Along with debating of the most pressing issues of the international political agenda, the meeting also addressed the issues of further development of economic cooperation and ways to overcome the crisis, opportunities for expansion of assistance to OIC Member States.

Held under the motto "Joint Vision for Greater Security and Prosperity for the Muslim World", the session was of great importance for Kazakhstan as it prepares to preside over the OIC Foreign Ministers council in 2011. One of the key outcomes of the conference was the signing an OIC Charter, a major document that would regulate the organization's activities and arrangements.

On the sidelines of the conference, Saudabayev also held bilateral meetings with OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov, United Arab Emirates - Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahayan, Thailand - Kasit Piromya, Egypt - Osman Mohamed Osman, Oman - Yusuf bin Alawi, Saudi Arabia - Nizar Al-Madani, Iran - Manouchehr Mottaki and other participants of the forum.

The OIC was founded in September 1969. The Organization brings together 57 Muslim countries in Asia, Africa and South America, as well as the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), which aims to ensure Islamic solidarity in the social, economic and political spheres, the struggle against colonialism, neocolonialism and racism and support the Palestine cause.

Kazakhstan joined the OIC in 1995, and is going to hold a chairmanship of its Foreign Ministers Council for one year following a conference in Astana in mid-2011.

As part of his stay in Tajikistan, Saudabayev also met with the host country's President Emomali Rahmon and Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi. Speaking as OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, he stressed the importance of Tajikistan as a key partner for OSCE in the region, a country in which the organization historically played an important role being involved in a peaceful settlement of the 1992-1997 Civil War and the nation's post-conflict development.

Following his meetings, Saudabayev said: "I expressed our appreciation for the support from Tajikistan to the OSCE, including the initiative of Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev to convene a summit this year. I stressed this country has a key role in promoting stability in Central Asia and is contributing to the security of the whole OSCE region. I also welcomed Tajikistan's close co-operation with the OSCE on strengthening border security, and commended the Government for its recent adoption of the Tajik National Border Management Strategy, which was developed in collaboration with the OSCE."

Asian Partners Constitute Tremendous Asset for OSCE

How the OSCE concept of promoting comprehensive security through cooperation and dialogue could also be an inspiration for Asia is the focus of an OSCE Conference with the Organization's Asian Partners - Japan, Korea, Thailand, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Australia - that took place on May 18-19 in Seoul.

A session at the two-day conference discussed multilateral security co-operation in Northeast Asia and the experience of the Corfu Process - the OSCE-anchored dialogue on the future of European security. Contributions from the Asian Partners to this process are particularly important considering the interconnectedness of European and Asian security.

"As the first Asian Country holding the OSCE Chairmanship, Kazakhstan pays special attention to the Euro-Asian dimension of our common security and is strongly committed to develop further co-



"The Asian Partners constitute a tremendous asset for the OSCE. Our dialogue and co-operation are active and dynamic. Together, we are producing interesting, concrete results", Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Konstantin Zhigalov said at the OSCE Asian Partners Conference in Seoul (May 18-19, 2010)

Photo by the Foreign Ministry

its Asian Partners in order to strengthen regional security and stability,” said Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Konstantin Zhigalov, speaking on behalf of the 2010 OSCE Kazakh Chairmanship.

“The Asian Partners constitute a tremendous asset for the OSCE. Our dialogue and co-operation are active and dynamic. Together, we are producing interesting, concrete results,” he added.

Chun Yung-woo, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, provided an update on the regional situation and stated that Korea looks forward to working closely with the OSCE to draw from its experience in building a mechanism for multilateral security in Northeast Asia.

OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut discussed the value of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, “based on the conviction that security requires politico-military co-operation between States, healthy economic and environmental governance and respect for the rule of law, human and democratic rights, and fundamental freedoms”.

De Brichambaut also discussed the OSCE's work to promote security in and around Afghanistan, which has been an OSCE Partner for Co-operation since 2003.

Ambassador Mara Marinaki of Greece, Chairperson of the Asian Contact Group, welcomed Australia, which joined the OSCE Asian Partnership in December 2009, to its first OSCE Conference with the Asian Partners for Cooperation. Australia's interest “proves the power of attraction of the OSCE and the vitality of the Asian Contact Group”, she said.

A session at the conference was devoted to women's contribution to security, with participants discussing the outcomes of a side event held Monday on the same topic. That event was the first of its kind held in the context of the OSCE Asian Partnership.

EBRD to Boost Investment in Central Asia



The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is set to increase its investments in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Some experts predict that within the next five years the flow of donor investments to the region will rise from 9 to 11 percent. The EBRD Board of Governors announced the decision at a 19th annual meeting and a business forum of the EBRD which began in Zagreb last Friday and gathered more than 60 delegations of the Bank's shareholders and 2,500 businessmen from across the world.

A Kazakh delegation headed by the country's Minister of Finance, EBRD Governor for Kazakhstan Bolat Zhamishev together with other participants assessed the latest political, economic and social changes and business opportunities in the country and across the EBRD region of operations.

The attention of the participants was drawn to the



EBRD Annual Meeting
and Business Forum

"It is significant that within the period since 1991 the EBRD has signed 100 projects in Kazakhstan with total business amounting to 2.4 billion euros", Minister of Finance Bolat Zhamishev said.

Kazakhstan's diversification under the State Intensified Industrial and Innovational Development Programme for the years 2010-2014, elaborated on President Nazarbayev's initiative.

Addressing the board, Zhamishev said the realization of joint projects in the priority sectors of Kazakh economy indicates a high level of mutual trust and understanding between the Central Asian nation's government and the EBRD, and demonstrates great potential for stimulation of further partnership.

In his words, Kazakhstan is willing to borrow some US\$ 500-750 million from the international markets in order to set a reference point for the corporate sector. The largest Central Asian economy has

been growing by 10 percent annually, until the global financial crisis slowed down, but failed to halt, Kazakhstan's economic growth.

"We are not planning to issue a lot of eurobonds. We have put our bond issuance on hold for a while and the country's corporate sector has lost its key reference point," the Minister noted.

According to Zhamishev, Kazakh authorities are not going to control prices in order to restrain inflation. The possibility of profit taxation, however, is admitted. As for the inflation rate, it is expected to raise no more than by 6-8 percent in 2010.

Since the days of Kazakhstan's independence in 1991, the EBRD has launched nearly 100 projects in this rapidly growing Central Asian nation, thus committing over €2.4 billion in various sectors of the country's economy, which mobilized additional investment worth more than €5 billion. In 2009 alone, the Bank embarked on twelve projects amounting to €336 million, with 71 percent falling on private sector, which again reflected the EBRD's traditional emphasis on the support for the private sector – even when strengthening the role of government in the country's economy. More than half of all joint projects have been rated as "good" or "excellent".

Earlier this year, the EBRD announced it has decided to adopt a new strategy for Kazakhstan, setting out the priorities for its activities in the country over the next three years. The bank has also signed an agreement with Kazakhstan's state holding and investment company Samruk-Kazyna and the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies to invest up to US\$ 1 billion in projects to diversify the Kazakh economy.

The EBRD said it will now focus more on the corporate sector by addressing immediate financing needs, including equity investment and local currency denominated funding. The bank will support the development of the private sector by financing projects that are promoting innovation, best business and environment practices, as well as energy efficiency.

In order to promote sustainability of the local banking sector, the EBRD will support the development of local currency and capital markets in Kazakhstan through engagement with pension funds and non-bank financial intermediaries. The bank will also advance further modernization of the country's energy sector with investments in projects promoting clean technology, sustainable energy, development of infrastructure and incentives for the involvement of the private sector.

The EBRD, which has more than 60 members, is an international financial institution which supports projects in 29 countries in the region from Central Europe to Central Asia, and remains the largest investor outside the oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan. Founded in 1991, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development uses the tools of investment to help build market economies and democracies in the formerly communist countries in the process of establishing their private sectors.

In 2011, EBRD's 20th annual meeting and a business forum will take place in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

Conquering World's Fourteen Highest Peaks



Vlad and Maxut holding their national flag on Lhotse summit.

Image by Vassiliy Pivtsov

The Kazakh National Climbing Team is on its way home after conquering Lhotse, the fourth highest mountain on Earth after Everest, K2 and Kanchenjunga, thus having completed an ambitious project named "Kazakhstan on the highest peaks of the world". The challenging project, aimed at conquering all of the world's fourteen peaks higher than 8,000 meters above sea level without supplementary oxygen, dates far back to the early nineties.

On May 16, 2010 some of Kazakhstan's most experienced professional climbers, Maksut Zhumayev, Vassiliy Pivtsov, and Vladislav Chekhlov successfully reached the top of Lhotse's main summit

in the Himalayas at 8,516 meters. Thus, the Kazakh team has broken the world record, drawing a bold line under the arduous years-long way towards conquering the fourteen eight-thousanders of the planet.

The Lhotse 2010 expedition was organized through the joint efforts of Central Sports Club of Kazakh Army and Kazakh Motor Company “Astana Motors”, who have long been assisting the national climbing team in their numerous ascents and tough adventures.

In the meantime, the best Kazakh and arguably post-Soviet mountaineer Denis Urubko has climbed a new route on the same Lhotse. Supporting his colleagues from the national team but going on an individual program, Urubko managed to lay another way to the summit and became the 15th alpinist in the world who climbed all 14 highest mountain peaks (the first in the former Soviet Union) and only the 8th one globally to do so without oxygen equipment. Among his other achievements is the first ever winter summit of Makalu, the world’s 5th highest mountain at 8,458 meters above sea level (along with his long-time partner Simone Moro of Italy).

Born in Russia, Denis stresses he is a true patriot of Kazakhstan, where he chose to live and where he took up mountain climbing seriously.

“Kazakhstan is one of the leading countries in alpinism with a great number of top climbers. I want to be a citizen of the country I live in. After all, Almaty is the city which made me the man I am today”, Urubko says.

Before setting off on May 16, Maxut Zhumayev wrote on his blog: “We are deeply grateful to all our friends and supporters from Kazakhstan, who were always there for us and helped the team in every possible way. We are glad to see our compatriots are always ready to understand us and share our concerns, hardships and adversities.”

“Unity of people in face of a common high goal, rapprochement of their interests and values was the core idea of the Kazakh expedition to Lhotse,” he continued as he described the last preparations before the ascent. “The moment has come. Forecasts predict a short period of calm weather on May 16. This is the gap we have long waited for, and the only chance we have now. We are the guests in a temple of eternal ice and snow, and we want to come back home cherishing our memories of touching a miracle”.

An expedition to Lhotse was initially conceived as the unclimbed Lhotse-Everest 2009 traverse. The Kazakh team set off for the traverse on March 28 last year. The goal of the project then was to climb two peaks, including the world’s highest mountain Everest at 8,848 meters and a Lhotse summit. Using no supplementary oxygen the crew members made two summit attempts. The final summit push ended up with retreat in bad conditions, and the loss of a team member Sergey Samoilo, who was swept away in an avalanche on the Lhotse Face.

The expedition was then suspended after this shocking news. Sergey was Denis Urubko’s frequent climbing partner. A 2005 climb on Broad Peak’s unclimbed Southwest Face gained the two sportsmen an ExplorersWeb award, and a nomination for the international Piolet d’Or (The Golden Ice Axe). In 2006, Denis and Sergei completed a new route on the northeast side of Manaslu. A year later, in 2007, they conquered K2 (the world’s second highest and deadliest mountain) in its latest summit ever and the first K2 north side summit in 11 years. The two mountaineers are the only to have gained no less than three Best-of-ExWeb awards, starting from 2005 to 2007.

This year’s return for Lhotse peak became the climbers’ number one priority, as the crew members set their minds on conquering the last summit in memory of their best friend, top-rank climber and emergency rescuer of Kazakhstan Sergey Samoilo.

Lhotse is a dramatic peak in its own right, due to its tremendous south face, which rises 3.2 km in only 2.25 km of horizontal distance, making it the steepest face of this size in the world. Its long east-west crest is located immediately south of Mount Everest, and the summits of the two mountains are connected by the South Col, a vertical ridge that never drops below 8,000m. The Lhotse south face has been the scene of many failed attempts, some notable fatalities, and very few ascents.

Also in the News:

- From May 19-21, the KazAtomExpo 2010 exhibition is taking place in Astana. It represents the latest global developments in nuclear energy and industry. The event brings together leading international and local companies, equipment manufacturers and materials for nuclear and electrical industries.
- On a visit to Minsk on May 19-20, Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Karim Massimov held talks with his Belarusian counterpart Sergei Sidorsky to discuss the current state and prospects of bilateral cooperation in trade and economy, including within the Customs Union. Following the negotiations, Massimov took part in the Belarusian-Kazakh business forum. He expressed strong interest in participation of Belarusian companies in projects under the Accelerated Industrial Development Program of Kazakhstan.
- Commercial banks increased their deposits in National Bank of Kazakhstan by 9.4 times in the first quarter of 2010. Their total volume amounted to 5.841 trillion tenge (1\$ = 146.74 KZT), which exceeds the volume of fourth quarter by 8.2% and 9.4 times higher than the first quarter's indices last year. An average sum of deposits per month accounted for 1.9 trillion tenge with an average rate of return down from 1.2% in the fourth quarter 2009 to 0.72% in the first quarter 2010. The growth of deposits was accompanied by the increase in National Bank's outstanding obligations by 44% up to 704 billion tenge in March 2010, in comparison to December 2009.
- On May 18, 2010 the Kazakh Government adopted a plan of measures to implement the recently-adopted National Unity Doctrine. Prime Minister Karim Massimov assigned the Ministry of Culture to coordinate related activities and report the results at the end of each year. To read more about the Doctrine, please see the previous issues of *Astana Calling*.
- Baikonur-Antiterror 2010 military exercise took place on May 19 in Baikonur, a city serving the namesake spaceport leased to Russia and located in the Kyzylorda oblast in south-western Kazakhstan. About 2,000 people were involved in the exercise, including officers of Kazakh and Russian security and emergency agencies of Kazakhstan. The action emulated a seizure of hostages by terrorists. Assault groups successfully seized the building, neutralized the 'terrorists' and freed the 'hostages'. Anti-terrorist special tactical exercises on the release of hostages are held annually in Baikonur, which improves the joint efforts of Russian and Kazakh military staff in conducting security operations.
- Deputies of the Kazakh Majilis presented a proposal to announce May 31 as the Memorial Day honouring victims of famine of the 1930s. "We have no right to forget these awful times of our nation's sufferings. We do not want to politicize the memory of famine times but we must not be silent," the deputies stressed. MP Aldan Smail, who made the proposal, reminded his colleagues and the wider public of a resolution commemorating victims of Great Famine of 1930s in the Soviet Unions that was adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recently. In Kazakhstan, May 31 is an official Memorial Day of the Victims of Political Repression, celebrated annually since 1997. According to conservative estimates, 3.8 million people fell under the Stalinist repressions of 1921-54 around the Soviet Union (103,000 of them in Kazakhstan), at least half a million of whom were killed with the rest being sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and labour camps.
- Kazakh and Russian scientists have set off for excursion tracking the footsteps of Peter Simon Pallas, a famous traveler, naturalist and explorer of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Executive Director of the Eurasian Alliance of Scientists Andrey Golubev says: "As early as in the 18th century Peter Pallas wrote about the nature of western Kazakhstan, and now we want to retry travelling the route he covered almost 250 years ago. Our goal is to find out what has changed during this time in the nature of our region." In his words, the expedition involved four scientists from the Institute of Zoology and Botany of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Kazakh scientists from Uralsk. The expedition is expected to take 20 days, finishing on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Peter Pallas is widely known for the expedition he made from St. Petersburg to the outskirts of Russia in 1768. The results of the expedition, initiated by Empress

Catherine II, were then published in a book “Journey to various provinces of the Russian empire” and described the flora and soil composition of the regions he visited.

Things to Watch:

- President of Turkey Abdullah Gul pays an official visit to Kazakhstan on May 23-26. During the visit, Abdullah Gul will discuss key aspects of bilateral cooperation on the international arena with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Chairmen of Senate and Majilis Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev and Ural Mukhamedzhanov. A number of bilateral agreements are to be signed following the meeting. The Turkish President is also expected to visit the city of Turkestan and address the professors and students of the International Kazakh-Turkish University named after Khoja Akhmet Yassawi.
- A regular meeting of the Foreign Ministers Council of Shanghai Cooperation Organization takes place in Tashkent on March 22, which is going to discuss issues of regional security and collaboration with a special focus on the organization’s efforts to help stabilize the situation in Kyrgyzstan.
- On May 23-31, Astana hosts Asian Championships in Women’s Boxing.
- Border crossings and land transportation in the OSCE region will be the focus of the 18th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, which will start on May 24 in Prague. Policymakers and experts will discuss the OSCE's role in promoting good governance, improving security and facilitating international transport by road and rail in the OSCE area during the three-day meeting. “More than 300 participants, including Abelgazy Kussainov, Kazakhstan’s Transport and Communications Minister; Ambassador Kairat Abdrakhmanov, the Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council; Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Galuska; OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, and Goran Svilanovic, the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, will take part in the meeting,” OSCE said. Two UN Under-Secretary-Generals also will participate: Jan Kubis, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and Cheick Sidi Diarra, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. The Forum theme stems from the importance of transport for economic growth and the consolidation of regional stability. The meeting’s agenda includes sessions on efficient and secure transit between Asia and Europe, barriers to trade and transport; as well as how to harmonize procedures and introduce new technologies along major transportation routes. The Prague meeting, the final part of the Forum process, was preceded by two preparatory conferences - held in October 2009 in Astana and in March 2010 in Minsk - and the first part of the Forum, which took place in February in Vienna.

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