



EURASIA SECURITY WATCH

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Related Categories: Central Asia

CORRUPTION: SCOURGE OF CENTRAL ASIA

Corruption remains a major problem endemic to all of the countries of Central Asia. In its latest report, governance watchdog Transparency International ranked Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as some of the most corrupt countries in the world, placing them at 156th and 153rd out of 168 nations, respectively. Transparency's Corruption Perceptions Index likewise ranked Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan poorly, with Tajikistan placing 136th and the latter two both coming in at number 123. "All five countries of Central Asia are... at the bottom of the CPI table," according to Svetlana Savitskaya, the organization's regional coordinator for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Europe and Central Asia. "[The score] is a signal that corruption is endemic, it is deeply ingrained, and it has a systemic nature [in the region]." (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 29, 2016)

A SHRINKING RUSSIAN FOOTPRINT IN TAJIKISTAN

Russia's numerous military engagements abroad are beginning to take their toll on the country's military posture in the "post-Soviet space." The Russian army is now said to be reducing its troop presence in Tajikistan. There are currently some 7,000 Russian troops stationed at two military facilities in Dushanbe and Qurghon Teppa - a deployment that is collectively known as the 201st military base. That deployment will be shrunk and reorganized into a unified brigade later this year as part of a larger overhaul of overseas military commitments, Russian military officials have disclosed. (*Asia-Plus*, February 1, 2016)

KAZAKHSTAN, SPEAKING PLAINLY

The government of Kazakhstan is moving forward with plans to change the national alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin. The step, formally ordered by President Nursultan Nazarbayev several years ago, envisions a full change by the middle of the next decade, with the goal of reducing Russian influence on national politics and society. "The switch from the Cyrillic to Latin alphabet will strengthen country's national interests in the media environment," Dauren Babamuratov, leader of the Bolashak nationalist movement, confirms. Nevertheless, the step is a controversial one, for both practical and political reasons. Nearly one-quarter of Kazakhstan's population of 18 million is ethnically Russian, and strong pro-Moscow sentiment continues to predominate in the country's northeast. Now, the two-year-old conflict in Ukraine has stirred up heightened activism - and pro-Russian attitudes - among this contingent, leading President Nazarbayev, despite his traditionally pro-Russian attitudes, to seek to edge his country out of the Russian orbit. (*Interfax-Kazakhstan*, March 1, 2016; *Reuters*, March 3, 2016)

KYRGYZSTAN TIGHTENS CONTROL OVER ISLAMIC EDUCATION

Kyrgyz madrassas (religious schools) and other Islamic institutions will now need to deal with greater governmental oversight than ever before. The country's Religious Certification Commission, which is in charge of overseeing Kyrgyzstan's Islamic schools, has passed a new ordinance requiring headmasters and teachers to be officially approved and certified in a move that many believe will lead to substantial firings across the Muslim-majority nation. The Kyrgyz government hopes that the measure will serve as a bit of added protection against the proliferation of radical Islamic teachings in the nation's religious schools and institutions. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 6, 2016)