



CADGAT

Central Asia Data Gathering and Analysis Team

**POLITICAL RELATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA**

## Central Asia Regional Data Review

No. 7, February 2013

The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the OSCE Academy established the Central Asia Data-Gathering and Analysis Team (CADGAT) in 2009. The purpose of CADGAT is to produce new cross-regional data on Central Asia that can be freely used by researchers, journalists, NGOs and government employees inside and outside the region. The project is managed and the reports are edited by Kristin Fjaestad and Indra Overland at NUPI. Comments and questions can be sent to: [cadgat@nupi.no](mailto:cadgat@nupi.no). The datasets can be found at: [www.osce-academy.net/en/cadgat/](http://www.osce-academy.net/en/cadgat/)

## **Introduction**

The states of Central Asia are often described in regional terms. This description has become further accentuated by a set of regional developments presented as the way forward in order to stabilize and develop the area before and after the 2014 withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan. This report examines the level of interaction among five Central Asian states as well as their relations with countries outside the region.

The data were collected between April and July 2012 by one researcher in each country, and variations in terms of data availability and quality across the countries must be noted. This report is divided into four main sections. First, an overview of official visits and meetings between Central Asian heads of state and others is provided. Section 2 focuses on formal diplomatic relations between the Central Asian states and other countries. Visa regulations are summarized in section 3. Finally, section 4 provides an overview of the participation of Central Asian states in various regional and international organizations.

## **Key findings**

- The frequency of visits and meetings among Central Asian heads of state varies significantly, at the bilateral and the multilateral level alike. While the Kazakhstan leadership has been very active in visiting both Central Asian neighbours and countries outside the region, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan pay fewer visits to their neighbours as well as to countries outside the region. Overall the data indicates that relations are better depicted in bilateral terms rather than 'regional' descriptions.
- Kazakhstan has the most embassies and consulates abroad, followed by Uzbekistan, while the three other countries have far fewer. This pattern is also reflected in the number of foreign representatives present in the Central Asian states.
- Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan belong to several regional and international organizations in which the one or more of the other Central Asian states do not participate.
- Russia remains the major external partner for the Central Asian states, followed by the USA, China and Turkey.

## 1. BRIEF NARRATIVES

For **Kazakhstan**, one priority in its external policy is economic cooperation and integration with Russia, while also developing dynamic relations with China and other countries. This priority to large extent shapes Kazakhstan's relations with the other Central Asian republics. Astana is interested in diversifying the sources of its economic influence in the region and has invested in energy projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan is viewed as a strategic partner, especially in light of the semi-competitive relations with Uzbekistan. Kazakhstani–Turkmen relations are mainly characterized by joint development of large energy-sector projects, among them the 'Turkmenistan–Kazakhstan–China' project. Kazakhstan also seeks to play a more visible role in Afghanistan by means of providing humanitarian aid and sending its troops to the country, and is the only Central Asian state which has an Assistance Program on Reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Throughout the past twenty years **Kyrgyzstan's** much-debated multi-vector foreign policy has focused on building balanced relations with major powers like Russia and the USA. By contrast, its relations with the other Central Asian states have often centred on ad hoc issues, like border delimitation, the energy grid or water disputes. Most complicated are Kyrgyz–Uzbek relations, where the agenda is heavily dominated by disagreements on water and hydropower stations, as well as regular border squabbles in the context of incomplete border delimitation. Kyrgyz–Turkmen relations are nearly non-existent. Kazakhstan has remained the single major Central Asian state to be seen as a long-term partner despite various unilateral border closures by Astana following turbulent political events in Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan share many challenges that can explain the relatively warm relations between the two countries, though the bilateral partnership agenda remains limited.

**Tajikistan's** foreign policy in Central Asia is driven by the desire to secure foreign investment inflows to key energy projects, foster regional trade, develop regional infrastructure through the country and promote regional security. Particular diplomatic attention is given to relationships with other Central Asian countries, given the historical ties, common heritage and shared threats. Within Central Asia, Tajikistan has significant economic ties with Kazakhstan (imports of foodstuffs and oil products) and Turkmenistan (imports of oil products and liquefied gas) and stable political relationship with both countries. Tajikistan is an ally with Kyrgyzstan, another upstream country, in discussions of key regional issues like as water use, and electricity generation and transmission. For instance, Tajikistan has cooperated extensively with Kyrgyzstan on the implementation of the Central Asia–South Asia (CASA-1000) electricity transmission line, a project that will enable the exports of surplus electricity from Central Asia to South Asia. Political relations with Uzbekistan have remained

tense, severely affecting economic and social interaction between the two neighbouring countries. For instance, rail transit trade to Tajikistan through Uzbekistan has disrupted several times in recent years because of Tajikistan's hydropower generation plans through the completion of the Roghun hydropower plant. Overall, Tajikistan strives to maintain relations with all Central Asian countries on the basis of good neighbourliness and mutually beneficial cooperation.

**Turkmenistan** is the only Central Asian state to have declared neutrality as the basis of its foreign policy. As a result, the country does not belong to various regional organizations, but prefers to build relations with Central Asian states bilaterally. With its large energy reserves, Turkmenistan is keen to diversify its energy export routes, and this guides its active cooperation with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, despite some tensions with the latter in recent years. Following its strained relations with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan has been actively seeking ways of obtaining energy from Turkmenistan. Given the low degree of inter-dependence and differing characteristics of the countries' political regimes, relations between Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan remain limited to formalities. Turkmenistan follows developments in Afghanistan closely; in particular it has been promoting the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India gas pipeline project.

**Uzbekistan** is a member of several regional organizations, but prefers to deal with issues with the other Central Asian states bilaterally rather than in multilateral forums. Brief skirmishes involving border guards and closures of border crossings for security and political reasons are common. Uzbekistan has participated in regional efforts to combat terrorism and the narcotics trade. Relations with its neighbours are diverse and shifting. The once-friendly political relations with Tajikistan are now very much strained. Relations with Turkmenistan, strained during the final years in power of Saparmurad Niyazov, have seen considerable thaw recently. Political relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also experience ups and downs but appear slightly more stable than relations with the two other ex-Soviet neighbours. The security situation with Afghanistan is of concern for the Uzbek government. Uzbekistan also has vested commercial/trade interests in Afghanistan, as expressed by electricity exports and participation in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan.

## 2. OFFICIAL EXCHANGES

**Table 1. Official visits among Central Asian states at the level of heads of states since 1991, bilateral (BL) and multilateral (ML)**

*Note: Bilateral meetings that occurred during/coincided with multilateral meetings are counted within multilateral ones.*

Visitor   Hosting State → ↓	Tajikistan		Turkmenistan		Kazakhstan		Uzbekistan		Kyrgyzstan	
	BL	ML	BL	ML	BL	ML	BL	ML	BL	ML
President of Kyrgyzstan	3	5	1	1	10	19	4	1		
President of Uzbekistan	2	2	8	2	10	15			3	2
President of Kazakhstan	2	7	4	9			9	5	3	13
President of Turkmenistan	2	0			2	8	5	2	0	1
President of Tajikistan			3	2	7	1	2	0	2	2

Sources: Data from websites of ministries of foreign affairs and news reports. This is not an exhaustive list.

**Table 2. Official visits of heads of Central Asian states to selected states outside Central Asia since 1991, both bilateral and multilateral visits**

Visits of Central Asian leaders to other states (non-CA)	Russia	China	USA	Turkey	Iran	Germany	S Korea	Japan
	Kazakhstan	51	13	8	10		4	
Kyrgyzstan	27	3	2	3				4
Tajikistan	8	2	2		1			
Turkmenistan	17			12	14			
Uzbekistan	12						6	

**Table 3. Official visits between pairs of Central Asian states at the level of heads of states by periods, since 1991 (all types of visits)**

***Bilateral meetings by years (all types of visits)***

	1991–95	1996–2000	2001–2005	2006–2011	Total
KAZ–KYR	6	11	9	15	41
KAZ–UZB	12	13	7	7	39
KAZ–TUR	3	8	3	9	23
KAZ–TAJ	4	3	2	8	17
UZB–TUR	1	8	1	7	17
KYR–TAJ	0	1	3	8	12
KYR–UZB	2	3	1	3	9
TAJ–TUR	0	2	0	5	7
UZB–TAJ	0	2	1	2	5
KYR–TUR	1	0	1	1	3
<b>Total</b>	29	51	28	65	

*Note: The table is organised according to numbers of meetings, meaning that the three yellow cells show the most bilateral meetings that take place most frequently. The brown cells show the countries that meet most rarely.*

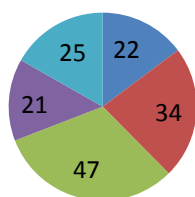
## 2. FOREIGN REPRESENTATIONS

**Table 4. Number of embassies and consulates abroad (including in other Central Asian states)**

*Note: Each embassy is counted once regardless of the number of foreign countries to which it is accredited. Honorary consulates are not included.*

Country	No. of embassies in foreign countries	No. of consulates in foreign countries
Kyrgyzstan	22	7
Uzbekistan	34	12
Kazakhstan	47	18
Tajikistan	21	4
Turkmenistan	25	4

### No. of embassies in foreign countries



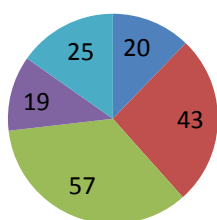
- Kyrgyzstan
- Uzbekistan
- Kazakhstan
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan

**Table 5. Number of embassies and consulates of foreign states, each Central Asian state**

*Note: Only embassies and consulates operating within the given state. Honorary consulates are not included.*

Country	No. of foreign embassies	No. of foreign consulates
Kyrgyzstan	20	1
Uzbekistan	43	0
Kazakhstan	57	25
Tajikistan	19	2
Turkmenistan	25	3

### No. of foreign embassies



- Kyrgyzstan
- Uzbekistan
- Kazakhstan
- Tajikistan
- Turkmenistan



### 3. VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR CITIZENS

**Table 6. States with mutual visa-free regime with Central Asian states, for all citizens**

KYRGYZSTAN	Remarks	KAZAKHSTAN	Remarks	TAJIKISTAN	Remarks	UZBEKISTAN	Remarks
Armenia	no time limit	Belarus	no time limit	Armenia	no time limit	Armenia	no time limit
Azerbaijan	no time limit	Kyrgyzstan	no time limit	Belarus	no time limit	Azerbaijan	no time limit
Belarus	no time limit	Russia	no time limit	Georgia	no time limit	Belarus	no time limit
Cuba	no time limit	Tajikistan	no time limit	Kazakhstan	no time limit	Georgia	no time limit
Georgia	no time limit	Uzbekistan	no time limit	Kyrgyzstan	no time limit	Kazakhstan	no time limit
Kazakhstan	no time limit	Armenia	90 days	Moldova	no time limit	Russia	no time limit
Moldova	no time limit	Azerbaijan	90 days	Russia	no time limit	Ukraine	no time limit
North Korea	no time limit	Georgia	90 days	Azerbaijan	90 days	Moldova	no time limit
Russia	no time limit	Moldova	90 days	Ukraine	90 days	Kyrgyzstan	60 days
Tajikistan	no time limit	Mongolia	90 days				
Vietnam	no time limit	Ukraine	90 days				
Malaysia	90 days	Serbia	30 days				
Mongolia	90 days	Turkey	30 days				
Turkey	90 days	Hong Kong	14 days				
Ukraine	90 days						
Uzbekistan	60 days						

- *In addition, these states have unilateral agreements on visa-free regime: Kyrgyzstan – 45 states, Kazakhstan – 3 states, Uzbekistan – 2 states.*
- *Turkmenistan has a unilateral visa-free regime with Turkey (visa-free entry for citizens of Turkmenistan to Turkey for 30 days).*

#### 4. MEMBERSHIP IN SELECTED REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Table 7. Membership in selected regional organizations, with years

	KAZ	KYR	TAJ	TUR	UZB	Remarks
<b>CA-centred</b>						
International Fund for Saving Aral Sea	since 1993	since 1993	since 1993	since 1993	since 1993	None
Central Asian Economic Community (Central Asian Union 1994–98)	1993–2002	1993–2002	1998–2002	NA	1993–2002	Became OCAC in 2002
Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC)	2002–05	2002–05	2002–05	NA	2002–05	Russia 2004–05; Merged with EurAsEC in 2005
<b>Within CIS area</b>						
EurAsEC	since 2001	since 2001	since 2001	NA	2006–08	Russia, Belarus since 2001
Collective Security Treaty Organization	since 1992	since 1992	since 1992	NA	1992–99; 2006–12	Russia, Armenia, Belarus
<b>Including non-CIS members of the region</b>						
Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Shanghai Five till 2001)	since 1996	since 1996	since 1996	NA	since 2001	China since 1996
Turkic Council	since 2009	since 2009	NA	NA	NA	Turkey, Azerbaijan
Economic Cooperation Organization	since 1992	since 1992	since 1992	since 1992	since 1992	Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Pakistan
Organization of Islamic Conference	since 1995	since 1992	since 1992	NA	since 1995	