

# **Central Asia Security Policy Brief No 4**

**The state at its borders:  
the internal dimensions  
of Kyrgyzstan's border  
security**

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## **The state at its borders: the internal dimensions of Kyrgyzstan's border security** by Katarzyna Czerniecka

### **Key points**

- Kyrgyzstan has failed to establish what the key objectives and functions of the state are at its borders and to prioritize security issues to be approached at the borders.
- The above is compounded by a disregard for the human security dimension and the application of largely inefficient methods of securing the border.
- A politicization of the delimitation question, abusing security sector institutions and a systemic acquisition of economic benefits from porous borders by strong political figures all result in a lack of political will to introduce substantial changes.
- This status quo approach has narrowed down the room for manoeuvre available for donors. Donors' practices tend to contribute to, rather than change, the obstinate system of border security.
- The Kyrgyz government should work to build a common understanding of the role of its borders and allow for an open, informed public debate on the delimitation issue.
- The donor community, driven by self-referenced notions of security, has failed to create a viable approach to Kyrgyzstan's borders.

NB: The views expressed in this paper are entirely and solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek or the GCSP.

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## Introduction

In October 2010 the Interim government decided to introduce a further (the fifth in the last several years) reform of the Kyrgyz border forces, subscribing the structure under the State National Security Service, answerable directly to the president, and renaming it Border Troops<sup>1</sup>. This move is a reflection of several processes unfolding in the country in terms of the approach of the Kyrgyz elite to the issue of external borders and border security.

This policy paper looks at how border security has been defined in present day Kyrgyzstan, what type of internal issues influence the border question and the implications that follow for the national and donor approaches to Kyrgyzstan's borders. It concludes with suggestions for a more defined stance with regard to border security and a more open public debate not limited to the land exchange question.

## Conceptualizing security at the borders

Official and legal discourse on border security, reflected in such documents as *The Law on Border Service*, *The Law on the State Border of the Kyrgyz Republic*, *The National Security Concept* (NSC), demonstrates a lack of prioritization and a common perception of security challenges and the types of threats that should and could be confronted at the national frontiers<sup>2</sup>.

The perception of border security has been heavily influenced by the traditional understanding of security. One of the principal obligations of border troops is to prevent military intervention

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<sup>1</sup> See: Ukaz prezidenta 41 ot 16 iyuliya 2010 goda and Ukaz Prezidenta KR O priznanii utrativshim silu Ukaza Prezidenta KR Ob utverzhdenii Polozheniya o Gosudarstvennoy pograničnoy sluzhbe pri Pravitelstve KR ot 13 oktiabriya 2010 goda.

<sup>2</sup> Zakon Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki *O pograničnoy sluzhbe Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki* (V redaksii Zakonov KR ot 16 oktiabrya 2002 goda N 140, 3 yanvarya 2005 goda N 2); Zakon KR *O gosudarstvennoy granitse Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki*, 10 sentiyabriya 2009, Bishkek or 19 marta 1999 goda N 27; *Kontseptsiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki*, Utverzhdena Ukazom Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki УТВЕРЖДЕНА ot 18 fevraliya 2009 goda N 115.

(*vooruzhbennoye vtorzheniye*) on Kyrgyzstan's territory<sup>3</sup>. This focus on territorial integrity is strengthened by the legal requirement to protect the border above all from changes which might be introduced to its route and to prevent other states or their citizens from making use of Kyrgyz borderlands<sup>4</sup>.

The National Security Concept defines terrorism and religious extremism as most important on the list of external pressures to national security. The catalogue unfolds to include international drug trafficking and the unconcluded process of border delimitation<sup>5</sup>. The tendency of the NSC is to define border-related threats as stemming from the semi-controlled border zones, especially in the Fergana Valley.

The Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategy (awaiting official endorsement by the government) is characterized by several inconsistencies and contradictions, especially when it comes to defining the 'level of border security', proposing solutions and progress indicators<sup>6</sup>. The document, focused on enumerating threats and challenges, has overlooked a proper cause analysis. This in turn leads to it suggesting several contradictory solutions.

This lack of a common perception of the role of the border and border security, followed by prioritization problems at the state level, is complemented by divergent opinions represented by expert and donor communities<sup>7</sup>. Several major approaches to the challenges for border security stand out:

- a) the traditional approach to security;
- b) a focus on the negative effects of unresolved border delimitation (delineation on the map and demarcation on the ground);
- c) a broadened concept of security and a concentration on non-traditional threats with the prevalence of drug trafficking;

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<sup>3</sup> *O gosudarstvennoy granitse...*; see also: interview with Zakur Tilenov (deputy head of the State National Security Service (ГЧНБ), in charge of border troops) *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 26.11.2010.

<sup>4</sup> *O gosudarstvennoy granice...* Territorial integrity has been classified as both Kyrgyzstan's national interest and the main aim of security policy, see: *Kontseptsiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti...*

<sup>5</sup> *Kontseptsiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti...*

<sup>6</sup> *Natsionalnaya strategiya sozdaniya y vnedreniya systemy kompleksnogo upravleniya gosudarstvennoy granitsey Kyrgyskoy Respubliki na peryod s 2010 po 2020 g.g.*

<sup>7</sup> The policy paper analyses research interviews held with local analysts, political scientists, border troops representatives and donor community experts in the second half of 2010. The author would like to stress that the critical approach the policy paper takes should not be extended towards particular individuals, whose devotion and expertise is not be underestimated.

d) an exploration of the human security concept;

The Batken events have created a kind of a paradigm influencing Kyrgyzstan's border security discourse and its focus on traditional threats (**the first approach**)<sup>8</sup>. This was reinforced by the Soviet conceptualization of borders and was further supplemented by perceptions and fears related to the war in Afghanistan. Altogether such an understanding focuses on the territorial integrity and terrorist threat explained as armed extremist/terrorist groups trespassing on Kyrgyz territory but also the fear of Uzbekistan's armed military incursions, occupation of land or indeed invasion<sup>9</sup>.

The terrorist threat perception and the traditional military- and territorial integrity-centered views of security have been intensified by regional policies and the activities of international actors, mainly the United States, and by regional (Chinese, Russian) approaches to security. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Peace Mission 2010 military exercise, while officially focused on neutralizing terrorists, employed heavy military equipment<sup>10</sup>. The U.S. enumerates support for anti-terrorism, border protection, sovereignty and territorial integrity enhancement as goals of its assistance to Kyrgyzstan<sup>11</sup>.

**The second approach** (centred on the effects of unconcluded border delimitation) is partly related to the above mentioned hard security framework. The unfinished process of Kyrgyz-Uzbek border delimitation is perceived as the main threat. It is based on the assumption that violation and changes to an unregulated border are plausible and that a border which has not been delimited is impossible to protect. The current state of affairs has been most commonly characterized by experts as *otsutstviye granits* (a lack of borders), meaning that only a physically visible border can be adequately protected (mainly from military-type threats). There is also a clear stance that delimitation is crucial in order to take a more liberal approach to borders.

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'Batken events' refers to the incursions by militants onto the Kyrgyzstan's territory in 1999 and 2000. See: Daniel Passon, Azamat Temirkulov, *Analysis of Peace and Conflict Potential in Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan*, ARC Berlin, April 2004; Bakhrom Tursunov and Marina Pikulina, *Severe Lessons of Batken*, Conflict Studies Research Centre, November 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Incursions by the Uzbek military and border guards onto the Kyrgyz territory have taken place regularly, causing the Kyrgyz government to protest at various, including the diplomatic, levels. Unofficially the presence of heavily armed border troops on the southern borders is seen as an important element of relations with Uzbekistan. See also: Erica Marat, Den Isa, 'US Assists Kyrgyzstan in Constructing Anti-Terrorist Center in Batken', *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Monitor*, Vol. 7, Issue 48, 11 March 2010.

<sup>10</sup> See: Roger McDermott, 'China Showcases Expeditionary Military Power in Peace Mission 2010', *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Monitor*, Vol. 7, Issue 174, 28 September 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Jim Nichol, *Kyrgyzstan: recent developments and U.S. interests*, Congressional Research Service, 9 September 2010.

Drug trafficking and industrial scale smuggling of other illegal and legal goods stand out among the perception of non-traditional threats to border security (**third approach**)<sup>12</sup>. Concerns related to and stemming from non-transparent transit mainly through Manas and Kant air bases have also been listed among the non-traditional challenges to border security. Some experts pointed to a total lack of state control over and knowledge about shipments through Russian and American bases.

Furthermore, migration and human-trafficking take a prominent place. Given the objective difficulty to define what migration actually is, especially in the Fergana Valley, this part of the discourse on border security might have been influenced by the European Union's particular framing of this issue.

The broad concept of security, encompassing economic issues as well, is also prominent and suggests that a lack of basic economic information to be registered at state borders is a serious non-traditional threat and a hindrance to establishing a serious Kyrgyz development strategy.

It is also common to focus on the human security dimension (**the fourth approach**), which reflects the perspective of an individual rather than a state. This approach stresses security challenges related to the difficulties faced by the local population of the borderlands and the challenges posed by the border regime to activities related to their livelihoods. This includes access to water, land, grazing areas, small-scale cross-border trade supporting livelihoods, and smuggling.

The lack of a common perception and the prioritization of threats and challenges to border security are supplemented by divergent opinions on how a secure border should look in Central Asia. Interestingly, the elements which are enumerated as being features of a secure border rarely correspond to the security challenges defined above. The questions of trust and the dissemination of information (on various levels) come to the fore when discussing a sufficiently secured border. The rule of law, in the simplest meaning of border guards having clear instructions and people being aware of their rights and obligations, is another aspect that should typify a secure border. Moreover, the picture of a secure border is characterized by the prevalence of well performed economic functions over the imperative of confronting a terrorist threat.

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<sup>12</sup> See also: Aleksandr Zelichenko, 'Kyrgyzstan resists drug expansion', *The Times of Central Asia*, 18 November 2010.

It is, however, necessary to underline that, with the exception of the delimitation question<sup>13</sup>; the theme of border security has not been part of an open public debate. Apart from selective news on border closures, which – when available – does indeed make front page news<sup>14</sup>, inhabitants receive scarce information, mostly events-related<sup>15</sup> or served at highlighting improvements to border protection defined in strictly military terms<sup>16</sup>. Border security has been given moderate attention during the recent electoral campaign, with several parties calling for a reform (Akshumkar), a robust reinforcement (Ak-Sanat) of border troops or indeed border fortification ('strengthening the inviolability of borders', National-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and Ak-Tilek) as well as prompt delimitation (Zamandash)<sup>17</sup>.

### **Borders IN Kyrgyzstan**

Despite the above presented largely divergent views, one aspect stands out as prevalent in the border security perception. This is the concentration on external aspects and the neglect of the domestic determinants of the border question in Kyrgyzstan. Bilateral and regional challenges have been put to the forefront of the 'border problem' in Central Asia<sup>18</sup>. Though clearly impossible to underestimate, they draw attention away from the internal dimension hindering Kyrgyzstan's border security to, arguably, equal extent. Domestic factors are related to several issues: the politicization of the delimitation question, bargaining with reference to security sector institutions and high-level appointments as well as the shadow economy of the border.

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. Interview with Valeriy Tsurkov (head of state cartography and geodesy service of Kyrgyzstan), *Vechnyy Bishkek*, 19 November 2010, pp.12-13.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. *Vechnyy Bishkek*, 12 November 2010.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. to the flee of former president Bakiyev's supporters through the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border (*Delo Nomer*, 20 October 2010, pp. 7-8); arrival of Russian border troops' advisors – 'V Oshe vysazhen «pogranichnyy desant',

1 September 2010 <http://www.report.kg/analytic/> (last accessed 4 October 2010) or selective information on 'border incidents', e.g. *Vechnyy Bishkek*, 27 October 2010, p.10.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Cholponbek Turusbekov, deputy head of Border Troops quoted in: *Dengi i Vlast*, No. 25, 5 November 2010, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> Elaborated on the basis of electoral programmes available at [www.vybirai.org](http://www.vybirai.org) (last accessed 4 October 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Not on rare occasions the border has been used instrumentally while dealing with issues related to economic protectionism, water, gas and grid disputes (see e.g. Shairbek Yuraev quoted in Gulnura Toralieva, 'Power Struggle Threatens Central Asian Electricity Grid', *IWPR Report News Central Asia*, Issue 596, 24 Nov 2009; 'Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek Authorities Take Action To Thwart Cross-Border Trade', *EurasiaNet*, 6 November 2009).

Kyrgyzstan has border agreements with China (1996 and 1999)<sup>19</sup> and Kazakhstan (2001, ratified in 2008)<sup>20</sup>. However, 600 km of the 900 km long border with Uzbekistan<sup>21</sup> and 940 km with Tajikistan are still unregulated. Given the complex land-resources nexus in the borderlands, especially of the Fergana Valley, the delimitation question cannot be tackled without land exchanges. Still, the two land exchanges concluded to date – popularly-called ‘border deals’ – met with grave public dissatisfaction, accusations of treason, land give-away or selling, and sparked anti-government demonstrations<sup>22</sup>. The delimitation question, discursively and purposefully narrowed down to land exchange – has been abused as yet another subject of political struggle<sup>23</sup>. This was reflected in Azimbek Beknazarov's strong criticism of Askar Akayev's regime after signing an agreement with China in 1999 and Omurbek Tekebaev's articulation of his resentments with regard to Karkyra being transferred to Kazakhstan in 2001<sup>24</sup>. The opinion that the agreements with China and Kazakhstan on land exchanges contributed to Presidents Akayev and Bakiyev respectively being ousted from power is a widely-shared one.

In addition to the state-level politicization, delimitation has its regional contentious aspect. It is undeniable that on the ground delimitation in the Fergana Valley, if it is to be undertaken, will involve difficult choices, divisions and the separating of communities., It will furthermore be hindered by the ambitions of regional leaders and *oblast*-level power struggles. Locally, the border and land are not viewed as a state affair, but are rather perceived as material property belonging to a particular *oblast*<sup>25</sup>.

The practice of balancing or playing security sector institutions against one another is yet another domestic aspect. Whether there is parliamentary oversight or direct presidential control over security

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<sup>19</sup> V. Paramonov, O. Stolkovskiy, *Pogranichno-territoriyalnyye problemy v kitaysko-centralnoazyatskikh otnosheniyaikh*, 17 February 2009, <http://www.easttime.ru/analitic/3/8/575.html> (last accessed 10 December 2010).

<sup>20</sup> *Kurmanbek Bakiyev podpisal Zakon o ratifikatsii Dogovora o granitse mezhdu Kyrgyzstanom i Kazakhstanom*, <http://www.consulkg.kz/news/main/536/> (last accessed 10 December 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Kyrgyz, Uzbek Officials Restart Border Delimitation, RFE/RL, 5 January 2010.

<sup>22</sup> See: Elina Karakulova, *Border Deal Could Spark New Kyrgyz Protests*, 15 April 2008, Open Kyrgyzstan, <http://www.open.kg/en/analytic/?id=56> (last accessed on 10.12.2010).

<sup>23</sup> Askat Dukenbaev and William W. Hansen, *Understanding Politics in Kyrgyzstan*, DEMSTAR Research Report No. 16, September 2003, pp. 7-9.

<sup>24</sup> See also: Nurshat Ababakirov, ‘Kyrgyz-Kazakh Border Deal Stirs Up Dust In Kyrgyzstan’ *CACI Analyst*, Vol. 10, No. 8, 16 April 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Salamat Alamanov (then head of intergovernmental commission on border issues with China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), published in ‘Opredeleniye granits – zadacha intelektualnaya’, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 5 December 2007.

services, defence and border troops and how they are related to one another is exploited by the political elite and hinders their goal-oriented organization.

Bargaining with regard to high-level appointments in border-related services, particularly border troops and customs, should also be distinguished. In that sense government posts may be used for current political struggles. But apart from political skirmishes, this fact is related to the state-crime nexus (understood as a merger of security service agencies with smuggling businesses) and the shadow economy of an unregulated border. Since it would be difficult to argue that the border is permeable exclusively because of corrupt practices of low level staff, one is to assume that parts of the state elite are interested in protecting rather than eliminating the porous nature of the borders<sup>26</sup>. While undoubtedly there have already been some positive effects of the post-Bakiyev era in terms of fighting drug trafficking (e.g. the reestablishment of the Drug Control Agency, DCA<sup>27</sup>), a significant change is a much longer-term process, especially given the most recent critical remarks regarding corruption prevalent in the customs services<sup>28</sup>.

### **Consequences – what role for the border, what role for the state?**

The high politicization of the delimitation question and societal objection to any compromise involving land exchange leads to political stalemate with regard to aspects defined as crucial for border security. The refusal to sign a border treaty proposed by Uzbekistan in 2006 may serve as yet another example<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, it is justified to claim that the new government will be characterized by risk aversion and will opt for a status quo approach.

The concentration on problems, the unclear vision of the functions of the border and the imprecise requirements for this border to be secure, are followed by an inability to assess the current situation

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<sup>26</sup> See also: George Gavrilis, *The dynamics of interstate boundaries*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.144; Svante E. Cornell and Regine A. Spector, 'Central Asia: More than Islamic Extremists.', *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 25, No. 1, 2002, p. 197; Erica Marat, 'Impact of Drug Trade and Organized Crime on State Functioning in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan', *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2006, p. 100; Svante E. Cornell 'The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration.' *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2006, pp. 40-42, 64; Anna Matveeva, *EU stakes in Central Asia*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies 2006, pp. 19-21.

<sup>27</sup> DCA was dissolved in October 2009 by the Bakiyev regime.

<sup>28</sup> Shairbek Juraev, *Kyrgyzstan Recovery and Reformation*, Policy Perspectives, Ponars Eurasia, August 2010, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Former government high level official (interview October 2010).

at the border<sup>30</sup>. All of these prevent the process of solution building. An appropriate assessment of the current state of affairs and the prioritization of challenges that should be taken into account at borders is crucial for establishing the role of the state at the borders. Failing to do so results in the misperception that the border – equated with the peripheries – in contrast to the centre, is an appropriate site for dealing with certain problems, for instance that enhancing border security will ‘incapacitate armed participants of ethnic conflicts’<sup>31</sup>. As a consequence the decision concerning the broader framework – whether Kyrgyzstan’s border should be further militarized according to the largely Soviet concept of ‘*granitsa na zhamke*’<sup>32</sup>, fortified<sup>33</sup> or arranged in a more transparent civilian-based way – is being postponed. Reflection on whether it is possible and effective to combine the military approach with the rule-of-law approach is also lacking.

Conceptualization and assessment deficits make the decisions regarding the organization of the border troops ad hoc, events-driven and susceptible to bargaining processes among the elite. Between 1999 and 2002, border issues were dealt with by both the Ministry of Defence (*Glavnoye upravleniye pogranichnoy okbrany*, GUPO MO) and the National Security Service (*Glavnoye upravleniye pogranichnogo kontrolya*, GUPK SNB). The Border Service (*Pogranichnaya sluzhba*)<sup>34</sup> was created in 2002 and in 2005 it was subordinated as the Border Troops to the National Security Service<sup>35</sup>. Between 2006 and 2010 the Border Service once again gained independence. Plans for a broader reform – such as the 6-year (2004-2010) border development program – clash with politically underpinned short-term decisions and economic difficulties<sup>36</sup>.

Given serious budgetary constraints and the fact that 30-40% of the 6000 border troops are conscripts, too much is being required from this particular service. Even being organized in three

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<sup>30</sup> Though the National Security Concept is unexpectedly straightforward declaring the border to be permeable (*prozrachna*), this rarely corresponds with high-level border troops officials’ statements.

<sup>31</sup> Keneshbek Dushebayev (head of State National Security Service), quoted by KABAR press agency on 19 July 2010, [http://kabar.kg/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=3674&Itemid=77](http://kabar.kg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3674&Itemid=77).

<sup>32</sup> a Soviet style approach to border protection largely focused on repulsing armed invasion. For further discussion of the concept see: pravovyye aspekty upravleniya granicami v Centralnoj Azji, Akademia OBSE, Bishkek 2006 pp.5-17

<sup>33</sup> As suggested by Zakur Tilenov (deputy head of State National Security Service (GSNB), in charge of border troops), *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 26 November 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki № 241 ot 31 avgusta 2002

<sup>35</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki № 183 ot 23 maya 2005 goda O merakh po sovershenbstvovaniyu gosudarstvennogo upravleniya v oblasti bezopasnosti Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki.

<sup>36</sup> Postanovleniye Pravitelstva Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki «Ob utverzhdenii Gosudarstvennoy programy po razvitiyu Gosudarstvennoy pogranichnoy sluzhby pri Pravitelstve Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki y obustroystvu gosudarstvennoy granitsy Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki na 2004-2010 gody ot 8 sentyabrya 2004 goda № 671.

different structures (responsible for checkpoints, the 'green border' and additional support, *obespecheniye deystviy*), it is doubtful that *pogranichniki* will successfully meet obligations as different as: patrolling high mountainous regions, fighting trafficking, extremism and contraband, being actually prepared to protect the country from a military invasion, abiding by the rule of law and being able to step in effectively when confronted with local land-water disputes, not to mention ethnic clashes. As a consequence, border troops tend to focus on activities which are ineffective (for example stopping cattle which is much more often unwittingly grazed in the border zone rather than smuggled as contraband or used for drug trafficking)<sup>37</sup>.

An unspecified conceptual approach to the border and border security prompts the application of largely inefficient methods, such as border closures<sup>38</sup>. While the potential of border closures as a viable strategy when dealing with the terrorist threat in mountainous regions is highly doubtful, it is the local populations that suffer most from such practices.

This leads to a further observation regarding the human security dimension, which, although it exists in discourses, it is given insufficient consideration in the practice of border security. The human security approach to the border question remains in conflict with the military-based organization of the border troops. The fact that the 'excess of borders' or their securitization actually provoke inter-communal tensions and deepen the lack of trust goes largely unnoticed. Most local cross-border activities have been criminalized, although given the current socio-economic situation, they are not expected to cease<sup>39</sup>.

### **Room for manoeuvre for donors**

Conceptualization difficulties and the internal aspects of Kyrgyzstan's borders influence the way international donors approach border security assistance<sup>40</sup>. Since Kyrgyzstan is faced with political stalemate, the donors themselves are trying to induce political will by drawing attention to problems and putting forward possible solutions. However, by doing so, they are adopting a strategy of self-restraint, especially given that the borders are an issue of state sovereignty and that the principle of

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<sup>37</sup> 24.kg, 23 October 2010 (last accessed 25 October 2010).

<sup>38</sup> E.g. of closing the border with Tajikistan: zpress.kg, 20 September 2010 (last accessed 20 October 2010).

<sup>39</sup> On an elaboration of illegal border crossing practices see: Analiticheskiy doklad po monitoringu mezhpravitelstvennykh soglasheniy o vzaimnykh poyezdkakh grazhdan, zaklyuchennykh mezhdu stranami Ferganskoy doliny, Yuristy Ferganskoy doliny bez granits, 2006, pp. 30-33.

<sup>40</sup> International donors engaged in border security activities include: the EU and UNDP (responsible for the BOMCA programme), the OSCE and the US.

ownership is supposed to be the main driver of development cooperation<sup>41</sup>. As a result, international engagement with borders has concentrated on the technical aspects of cooperation (an equipment-and-training approach) and has left political or systemic issues untouched.

The limited room for manoeuvre and a partial readiness for merging, rather than just coordinating initiatives, is pushing donors into copying some of their programmes<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore it is forcing them to actually fit into the system or, in the worst-case scenario, to become co-opted. On the one hand, technical skills are very much needed in a country which has been developing its border-related cadres only for the past ten years. On the other hand, providing short-term training not only has limited potential, but also enforces the system in which posts, for various mostly non-transparent reasons, are offered to those with inadequate qualifications. Broader support for the creation of an accountable border security system which respects laws is mostly lacking.

The picture is complicated even further by the divergent visions of donors and international actors on border security, its goals and management options. The EU's emphasis on migration issues, American perceptions related to terrorist threats and the SCO's militarized approach are incompatible. This makes Kyrgyzstan's strategic choices even more difficult, especially given that the country is highly dependent on foreign security funding. At the same time certain donor-promoted approaches – e.g. Integrated Border Management – have been subject to wider criticism<sup>43</sup>.

Western and international donors either neglect or are unable to engage with the already existing influence on border security exercised by regional powers and organizations. Ongoing cooperation between the power structures of the Commonwealth of Independent States is largely unnoticed. Donors take Russia's role into account but are incapable of assessing it properly or engaging with it on a regular basis. Russia, though much trusted by a large part of Kyrgyzstan's elite and society, acts non-transparently with regard to the support it grants to border security. Consequently, though it is presently one of the sole actors which could influence the delimitation process, it may lose this potential.

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<sup>41</sup> *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, 2005, available at [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

<sup>42</sup> Compare: Regional Trade Liberalization and Customs Project implemented by USAID and 'Supporting regional economic cooperation' programme implemented by The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

<sup>43</sup> Otwin Marenin, *Challenges for Integrated Border Management in the European Union*, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Occasional Paper, №17, 2010 and Sarah Wolff, 'EU Integrated Border Management Beyond Lisbon', in: *Shaping the Normative Contours of the European Union*.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

Challenges are mounting before the new government, but the way in which it handles its border question will have consequences for Kyrgyzstan's security in the broadest meaning of this word. The inevitability of the border question to Kyrgyzstan and the fact that borders are bottlenecks for improvement in various other spheres is one aspect of this. The other is that borders tend to mirror the functioning of the state and state sovereignty.

While the border is definitely an international phenomenon, the government should not refrain from solving issues that could be addressed inside the country. A clearer stance on certain border questions within the country would make it easier to negotiate with neighbouring countries and to acquire international support for such negotiations.

The Kyrgyz government should work towards building a common understanding of the role of its borders. Threat and risk assessment would help prioritize security issues. In that process, it should distance itself from external threat perceptions of the EU, the US or Russia. A reflection on the appropriateness of terrorist threat discourses is necessary. In addition, an information campaign and an open, trespassing the delimitation question public debate on the borders of Kyrgyzstan would be welcome.

Since most challenges to border security are not linear, meaning that they are part of much broader frameworks, concentration on the delimitation question may not be appropriate. An alternative and temporary approach could be the creation of a common border zone, where certain cross-border trade exchanges would be granted legal and economic legitimacy. This, however, calls for a deconstruction of the negative perception of cross-border activities and special consideration to be granted to the human security perspective.

If the delimitation question it is to be undertaken acutely, Kyrgyzstan's government energy should be concentrated on soliciting an arbiter possessing the potential to play a coordinating role and to provide the enabling policy environment.

A diversified approach to certain parts of the border and an adjustment of skills requirements is necessary and should be strengthened. The 'local solutions to local problems' approach and taking into account the character of a particular border stretch in defining specific policy and organizational choices is a step in a right direction. Notwithstanding, more thought is needed on how to assess and evaluate whether a particular border is a well functioning one.

International actors should limit the self-referenced perceptions of Kyrgyzstan's border security. Coordination between donors may not be enough and the merging of certain programmes could be taken into consideration, especially since there are effective ways of overcoming the visibility problem.

The EU, the OSCE and the US should focus on trust and confidence building policies. It is important to broaden and deepen the modes of engagement in order not to start at the end of the chain – e.g. by training customs officers who should not have been hired in the first place – but to work towards acquiring a more systemic change.

While harmonization in terms of the practical (read: project) approach to border security is welcome, international actors should reflect on their broader objectives and visions of border security; whether they could be reconciled or coordinated.

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