

CADGAT

Central Asia Data Gathering and Analysis Team

HOLIDAYS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Part I: Laws and official holidays

Central Asia Regional Data Review

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In 2009, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the OSCE Academy established the Central Asia Data-Gathering and Analysis Team (CADGAT). 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 by Kristin Fjaestad and Indra Overland at NUPI. Comments and questions can be sent to: cadgat@nupi.no. The datasets can be found at: www.osce-academy.net/en/cadgat/

Introduction

Recent academic literature on Central Asia has shown an increasing interest in holidays and the celebrations that mark such days as a way of understanding nation- and state-building policies in the region. This CADGAT dataset provides a good starting point for a comparative approach. It presents an overview of national holidays in the five Central Asian countries: what the holidays are and when they are celebrated; and traces the development of national holidays (some are no longer celebrated, whereas new ones have arrived) back to independence in 1991.

The data were collected between March and September 2014 by individual researchers in each of the five countries. Variation in terms of data availability and quality across the countries must be noted. The sources and methods used are listed in footnotes.

This report is the first about various aspects of holidays in Central Asia. In this report, we present public holidays and the laws and regulations on holidays in the five countries. The second report in this series concerns the phenomenon of 'professional holidays' in the five countries.

Main findings

- The five Central Asian countries have four holidays in common: New Year's Day (1 January), Women's Day (8 March), the Spring Equinox (21/22 March) and Victory Day (9 May).
- Kyrgyzstan has kept more of the Soviet era holidays after independence than the other countries.
- Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the only two countries in which Orthodox Christmas is still a day off (celebrated on 7 January).
- With the exception of Uzbekistan, all the countries have kept the Soviet tradition of moving holidays that fall on a Sunday to the next working day.
- Uzbekistan is the country with the lowest number of celebrated holidays as well as the lowest number of days off in total
- In Kazakhstan, new holidays have been devoted to the first president of the country, Nursultan Nazarbayev. Similar holidays were established in Turkmenistan during the rule of Saparmurat Niyazov, but were abolished in 2008.

Calendar of public holidays in Central Asia

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
1 KZ, KR, TJ, TM, UZ	1	1	1	1 KZ, KR, TJ	1	1	1	1 UZ	1	1	1
2 KZ	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5 KR	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6 KZ	6	6	6 TM	6 TJ	6
7 KZ, KR	7	7	7	7 KZ	7	7	7	7	7	7 KR	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8 UZ
9	9	9	9	9 KZ, KR, TJ, TM, UZ	9	9	9	9 TJ	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
12 TM	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12 TM
13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
18	18	18	18	18 TM	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
19	19 TM	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20
21	21	21 KZ, KR, TJ, TM, UZ	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	21
22	22	22 KZ, TJ, TM	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
23	23 KR	23 KZ, TJ	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23
24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26
27	27	27	27	27	27 TJ	27	27	27	27 TM	27	27
28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28 TM	28	28
29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29
30	30	30	30	30	30	30 KZ	30	30	30	30	30
31	31	31	31	31	31	31 KR	31	31	31	31	31

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS		
16 December ¹	Independence Day	Introduced in 1995
STATE HOLIDAYS		
1–2 January	New Year's Day	Celebrated since the Soviet period
8 March	International Women's Day	Celebrated since the Soviet period
21–23 March	Nauryz Meyrami	Introduced in 1991 as one day off (22 March); expanded to 3 days in 2009 ²
1 May	People's Unity Day	Celebrated since 1996; in the USSR was celebrated as Labour Day
7 May	Homeland Defender Day	Introduced in 1998; not a day off until 2012 ³
9 May	Victory Day	Celebrated since the Soviet period
6 July	Capital Day	Since 2006, Capital Day is celebrated on 6 July (previously 10 June) ⁴ ; is President Nazarbayev's birthday.
30 August	Constitution Day	Introduced in 1995 ⁵
1 December	Day of First President	Introduced in 2011 ⁶
<p>In addition to these fixed days, Orthodox Christmas Day (celebrated on 7 January) and the first day of Kurban Ait (Muslim holiday) are days off.⁷ Kurban Ait is determined annually by the lunar calendar and set annually by decisions of the government of Kazakhstan. Oraza Ait (the end of Ramadan) is celebrated in Kazakhstan, but not a day off. Kazakhstani legislation does not emphasize the religious nature of these holidays.</p>		

The official public holidays of Kazakhstan are regulated by the *Law on Holidays*⁸ and the *2007 Labour Code*.⁹ The Law on Holidays operates with three categories: national, state, and professional/other holidays in Kazakhstan. *National holidays* are defined as holidays to celebrate events of historical importance and great influence on Kazakhstani nation-building. *State holidays* are holidays dedicated to socially and politically important events traditionally celebrated by the people of Kazakhstan. *Professional and other holidays* are celebrated by various categories of people and do not have the same status as national and public holidays.

¹ Celebrated 16–17 December. By the Decree of the President that has the force of law # 2534 as of 18 October 1995. The current status is defined by the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Holidays # 267, of 13 December 2001.

² The holiday started to be celebrated following the Decree of the President of Kazakh SSR 'On People's Holiday of Spring - Nauryz' of 15 March 1991. With the law 'On introducing changes into the Law on Holidays in the Republic of Kazakhstan' #152-IV, of 21 April 2009, the number of days off was expanded from only one day (22 March) to three (21–23 March).

³ Introduced by the law 'On introducing changes into the Law on Holidays in the Republic of Kazakhstan' # 3827, of 20 January 1998. According to the Presidential Decree № 43-V of 19 October 2012, the holiday was included into the list of public holidays and announced as a day off. Defender of the Fatherland Day had been 23 February in Soviet times.

⁴ On 6 July 1994 the Supreme Council of Kazakhstan issued a decree on moving the national capital from Almaty to Astana. Capital Day also coincides with the birthday of the First President. Officially introduced by the law 'On introducing changes into the Law on Holidays in the Republic of Kazakhstan' # 47-IV, of 25 June 2008.

⁵ Initially introduced by the Decree of the President # 2534, of 18 October 1995. That decree is no longer in force. The current status is defined by the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On Holidays # 267, of 13 December 2001.

⁶ By the law 'On introducing changes into the Law on Holidays in the Republic of Kazakhstan' # 509-IV 3PK on 14 December 2011.

⁷ Labour Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan № 251-III, of 15 May 2007.

⁸ The law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 'On Holidays' # 267, of 13 December 2001.

⁹ The Labour Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan № 251-III, of 15 May 2007.

As of 2014, Kazakhstan has one national and nine state holidays, which are days off from work. Any changes to the law are introduced by presidential decree.

According to the Article 97 of the Labour Code the Government of Kazakhstan has the right to transfer days off to other days. For example: When a public holiday falls on a Sunday, it is postponed to the next working day. If a holiday falls on Thursday the government may issue a decree making that Friday a day off. However, either the previous or the next Saturday will be a working day. On a pre-holiday day there is an unofficial practice of having a shorter working day. 25 October used to be celebrated as the Day of Republic, but was struck from the list of public holiday by the law 'On introducing changes into the Law on Holidays' # 152-IV' of 22 April 2009. 23 February was celebrated as Homeland Defender's Day in the USSR, but is now celebrated as part of the 7 may holiday. Although this is not included on the holiday list and has no official status, it remains a popular celebration day among the general public.

Kyrgyzstan

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS		
1 January	New Year	Celebrated since Soviet period
7 January	Orthodox Christmas	Introduced in 1992
23 February	Defender of the Fatherland Day	Established as the official day off since 2003 + celebrated in Soviet period
8 March	International Women's Day	Celebrated since Soviet period
21 March	Nooruz	Introduced in 1992
1 May	Labour Day	Celebrated since Soviet period
5 May	Constitution Day	Introduced in 1993
9 May	Victory Day	Celebrated since Soviet period
31 August	Independence Day	Introduced in 1992
7 November	Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution	Celebrated in Soviet period, abolished in 1992 and re-introduced in 2002
<p>In addition to these fixed days, two Muslim holidays, Orozo Ait and Kurman Ait, are determined annually by the lunar calendar and set annually by decisions of the government. Celebrations of these as official holidays started in 1992.</p>		

As of 2014, Kyrgyzstan has twelve official holidays, which are official days off work. On a pre-holiday day, working hours are one hour shorter (in 2014 there were seven such days). When a public holiday falls on a Sunday, it shifts to the next working day. The government has the right to 'postpone' days off to other days. For example, in 2014 Independence Day fell on a Sunday. According to legislation, the holiday moves to the next working day – Monday, 1 September. However, because 1 September is significant as the Day of Knowledge (and the day when study in schools and universities usually begins), it was decided to move the day off from Monday, 1 September to Friday, 5 September, that year. Thus, Kyrgyzstan celebrated 31 August as Independence Day (on Sunday), 1 September was a working day, and September 5, 6, and 7 (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) were announced as 'weekend' days.¹⁰

The same is applied for the transfer of days off after the New Year. For example, in 2015 the holidays fell on December 31, Wednesday and January 7, Wednesday. So, the Ministry of Education worked out and the government approved the following transferral: Official days off are one week from January 1 (Wednesday) until January 7 (Wednesday). January 2, 5 and 6 are transferred to three Saturdays - January 10, February 21 and March 23, 2015.¹¹

Kyrgyzstan has also had several holidays that have later been abolished. After the 2005 Tulip Revolution, 24 March was announced as a holiday, People's Revolution Day, by Decree of the

¹⁰ See Svetlana Moiseeva. 'Ministry of Labour proposed to compensate Sunday, August 31, with Friday'. *Vecherniy Bishkek*. 20 August 2014, and http://www.vb.kg/doc/284004_mintryda_predlojilo_kompensirovat_voskresene_31_avgysta_piatnicey.html, Accessed 11 October 2014.

¹¹ Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic issued on December 26, 2014, №727 "On the Transfer of Days off". *Government of the Kyrgyz Republic*. <http://www.gov.kg/?p=48263>, Accessed 26 January 2015.

President of the Kyrgyz Republic № 139, dated 22 March 2006. Earlier, on 6 March that year, a Presidential Decree was issued, declaring 24 March 24 as the annual Day of National celebration.¹² In March 2008 Kyrgyzstani parliamentarians approved the law on amendments to the Labour Code of the Kyrgyz Republic (17 March 2008), declaring 24 March as a day off. In 2012, it was excluded from the list of public holidays.¹³

A holiday honouring the 2010 April revolution was established in 2011. On 19 December 2011, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, signed the law 'On the Day of People's April Revolution – April 7,' which was adopted earlier by the Parliament.¹⁴ However 7 April is not celebrated as a day off, but just as a memorable day.

In 2014 the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Youth introduced amendments to the Labour Code, which would have cancelled celebrations on 23 February (Defender of the Fatherland Day), 5 May (Constitution Day) and 7 November (Day of the Great October Socialist Revolution).¹⁵ On 31 December 2013, a corresponding bill of law had been submitted to the Parliament for consideration. The same amendments proposed setting New Year holidays from 1 to 3 January. The reasons for eliminating the three first-mentioned holidays were the following. On the Fatherland's Defenders' Day, it is said that by Presidential decree, the Day of Kyrgyzstani Armed Forces was announced on 29 May 1992. Celebrating Constitution's Day on 5 May lost relevance due to repeated changes in the constitution made in recent years. As the Kyrgyz Republic is the only country in Central Asia to celebrate 7 November as the Day of the Great October Socialist, the drafters of the bill proposed excluding this holiday from the list of festive dates. In May 2014, members of parliament decided that the bill required improvements, and it was withdrawn from the Parliament.¹⁶

¹² 'Today in Kyrgyzstan is the Day of the People's Revolution March 24, 2005'

<http://www.kginform.com/ru/news/20120324/08381.html>, Accessed 24 May 2014.

¹³ 'In Kyrgyzstan, March 24 Day of the People's Revolution is excluded from the list of public holidays' *Kabar*. 6 July 2012.

<http://www.kabar.kg/rus/politics/full/36535>, Accessed 24 May 2014.

¹⁴ The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic 'On the Day of People's April Revolution - April 7' is signed. *Vesti.kg* 19.12.11

http://www.vesti.kg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=9386&Itemid=100, Accessed 24 May 2014.

¹⁵ See Kudryavtseva, Tatyana. The Government of Kyrgyzstan approved the cancellation of holidays on 23 February, 5 May and 7 November 24.kg, January 21, 2014. <http://www.24kg.org/community/169890-pravitelstvo-kyrgyzstana-odobrilo-otmenu.html>, Accessed 5 May 2014.

¹⁶ 'May holidays remain in force'. *Gazeta.kg*. 29 April 2014. <http://www.gazeta.kg/546-news.html>, Accessed 26 January 2015.

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS		
1 January	New Year	Celebrated since Soviet period
8 March	International Women's Day	Celebrated since Soviet period
21–24 March	Nawruz	Celebrated since 1991
1 May	Labour Day	Celebrated in Soviet period and again since 1997 after the signing of the Peace Accord
9 May	Victory Day	Celebrated since 1991
27 June	National Reconciliation Day	Celebrated since 1997
9 September	Independence Day	Celebrated since 1991
6 November	Constitution Day	Celebrated since 1994
In addition to these fixed days, two Muslim holidays, Idi Ramazon and Idi Qurbon, are determined annually by the lunar calendar ¹⁷ and set by decisions of the government. Celebrations of these as official holidays started in 1992.		

Tajikistan celebrates a diverse range of holidays with historical, cultural, professional, religious or political significance. Historical and cultural holidays include Nawruz celebrations,¹⁸ Shashmaqom day¹⁹, Rudaki Day, and anniversaries of major Persian/Tajik poets. Whereas most professional holidays originated in the Soviet period and are usually celebrated only by relevant professional groups, Tajikistan's political and religious holidays emerged mainly in post-independence period. The Law of Tajikistan 'On Holidays' defines dates, regulatory aspects as well as procedures for celebrating holidays, such as flag-raising and social activities like parades, fireworks, etc. All ministries of the government, committees and specialized agencies are also involved and the Law is amended from time to time. The celebration of national political holidays usually includes public activities organized by local and national authorities, such as parades, concerts and fairs. When a national holiday comes on a weekend, the next or preceding working day becomes a non-working day.²⁰

¹⁷ The exact dates of Idi Ramazon and Idi Qurbon are set by the Committee on Religious Affairs in consultation with the Ulema (Muslim clergy).

¹⁸ Celebrated on 21 March, day of the spring equinox, traditional Persian/Central Asian New Year.

¹⁹ Shashmaqom is traditional music of Tajikistan.

²⁰ This is decided on an *ad hoc* basis.

Turkmenistan

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS		
1 January	New Year	Celebrated since Soviet period
19 February	National Flag Day	
8 March	International Women's Day	Celebrated since Soviet period
21–22 March	Novruz-Bayramy	
9 May	Victory Day	Celebrated since Soviet period ²¹
18 May	Day of Revival, Unity, and the Poetry of Magtymguly Fragy	Formerly celebrated as Constitution Day
6 October	Day of Remembrance of the victims of the 1948 earthquake	Announced in 1992, made a public holiday in 1994 ²²
27–28 October	Independence Day	Celebrated since 1991
12 December	Neutrality Day	Since 1995 ²³
<p>In addition to these fixed days, two Muslim holidays, Oraza Bayramy and Kurban Bayramy, are determined annually by the lunar calendar; the exact date is determined by Decree of the President of Turkmenistan 'On Oraza Bayramy'. Celebration of these holidays started in 1998.²⁴</p>		

As of 2014, Turkmenistan has eleven official holidays, which are days off. When a public holiday falls on a Sunday, it is postponed to the next working day. On a pre-holiday day, the working day is one hour shorter (in 2014 there were six such days). The President of Turkmenistan has the right to transfer holidays that coincide with weekend days to other working days.

Since independence, special anniversaries associated with the history of Turkmenistan and with significant events of independence have been celebrated. These are Memorial Day (12 January) in honour of those who died defending Geoktepe Fortress on 12 January 1881; Day of Remembrance and National Mourning dedicated to the memory of National Heroes of Turkmenistan of the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945 (8 May, but abolished again in 2008); Day of Remembrance, dedicated to the memory of victims of the Ashgabat earthquake in 1948; Independence Day of Turkmenistan, Neutrality Day; the Feast of the State Flag of Turkmenistan; and the Day of Revival, Unity and Poetry of Magtymguly Fragy. In 2014, however, Memorial Day on 12 January was abolished and 6 October was announced as Memorial Day, by presidential decree.²⁵

Turkmenistan has also a number of national and professional holidays, which are working days. Since independence, a whole group of new celebrations has come: Turkmen Horse Holiday, Turkmen Melon Festival, 'Drop of Water – A Grain of Gold' Festival, the Feast of the Turkmen Bakhshi, Neighbourliness Day, celebrations associated with the harvest of grain crops and cotton

²¹ *Neutral Turkmenistan*, 5 May 2000

²² *Turkmenskaya Iskra* (Turkmen Spark) 20 February 1992 № 4 3(19963) and 11 July 1995 № 160(21081).

²³ 12 December 1995 the 50th session of the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution which supported the concept of Turkmenistan as a state with the status of permanent neutrality.

²⁴ Decree signed by the President of Turkmenistan, 14 January, 1998

²⁵ See <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/eng/?id=4053> and <http://www.parahat.info/law/2014-10-06-zakon-turkmenistana-ovnesenii-izmeneniya-v-trudovoy-kodeks-turkmenistana> (both accessed 31 October 2014) for more information.

'Galla Bayramy', and harvest festival. These nationwide holidays are included in the Labour Code of Turkmenistan.²⁶

There are also several holidays that have been added, changed or removed since independence. In 1993 the Parliament of Turkmenistan adopted a resolution establishing 19 February, the birthday of President Saparmurat Niyazov, as a holiday and day off work; this was rescinded in 1994 by Presidential Decree. By a new Decree (signed 26 December 1994), 19 February was announced as National Flag Day and declared a day off work.²⁷ 1 May was also removed as a national holiday after independence.²⁸

8 March was celebrated as Women's Day until 2001. In 2001 former President Saparmurat Niyazov excluded this day from the list of holidays and announced 20 March as Women's Day, which coincides with his mother's birthday.²⁹ Novruz Bayramy (21–22 March) and Women's Day together were proclaimed the National Holiday of Spring and Women. In January 2008, in accordance with the Law on Amendments to the Labour Code of Turkmenistan, Women's Day was moved back to 8 March and declared as a day off.³⁰ 21 March was announced as Novruz-Bayramy – Holiday of Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic and was declared a day off.³¹ The Spring Holiday is now celebrated with two days off work.

21 June was celebrated as the Day of the Election of the First President, but was never a day off. It was removed from the list in 2008.

²⁶ 'Decree was signed in August 15, 2008', *Neutral Turkmenistan*, 16 August 2008.

²⁷ *Neutral Turkmenistan*, 28 December 1994

²⁸ See <http://centralasiaonline.com/ru/articles/caii/features/2009/05/06/feature-01>, Accessed 31 October 2014.

²⁹ See www.archive.chrono-tm.org/?id=1837, Accessed 31 October 2014.

³⁰ <http://www.calend.ru/holidays/0/0/18/9/> (accessed 16 August 2014), *Neutral Turkmenistan*, 21 March 2002.

³¹ *Neutral Turkmenistan*, 28 February 1991.

Uzbekistan

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS, UZBEKISTAN		
1 January	New Year	Celebrated since Soviet period
8 March	International Women's Day	Celebrated since Soviet period
21 March	Navroz	Introduced immediately after 1991
9 May	Memorial and Remembrance Day	Celebrated since the Soviet period; renamed from Victory Day in 1999
1 September	Independence Day	Celebrated since 1991
1 October	Teacher's Day	Formerly a professional holiday day, became day off in 1996 ³²
8 December	Constitution Day	Celebrated since 1992
<p>In addition to these fixed days, two Muslim holidays, Roza Hayit and Qurban Hayit, are determined annually by the lunar calendar; the exact date is set by Presidential Decree. Celebration of these holidays started immediately after independence in 1991.</p>		

As of 2014, in Uzbekistan there are nine official holidays, which are days off. When a public holiday falls on a Sunday, legislation does not provide for automatic transfer of the holiday to the next or previous working day. However, the President of Uzbekistan may issue a decree transferring the holiday to another day. On a pre-holiday day, the working day is one hour shorter (in 2014 there were nine such days).

A number of Soviet-era holidays were abolished in Uzbekistan soon after independence. Among these are 7 November (Day of Great Socialist Revolution), and 23 February (Fatherland Defenders' Day). Fatherland Defenders' Day was moved from 23 February to 14 January in accordance with the law of the Republic of Uzbekistan as of 29 December 1993; the 'Fatherland' is now Uzbekistan, not the Soviet Union.³³ Another Soviet-era holiday was 27 November, the Day of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Uzbekistan, which marked the day in 1924 when Uzbekistan appeared on the map in its current form.³⁴ In the late 1990s, 1 May was abolished as Labour Day; 1 May was declared as a 'Day of Fountains' in 2014.

³² Information from <http://natlib.uz/ru/article/299/>. Accessed 27 June 2014.

³³ Information from <http://natlib.uz/ru/article/299/>. Accessed 27 June 2014.

³⁴ Information from <http://www.neweurasia.net/ru/politics-and-society>. Accessed 27 June 2014.