
CAN KAZAKHSTAN LOOK TO UZBEKISTAN FOR ECONOMIC DYNAMISM?

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Can Uzbekistan Save Kazakhstan? Mark Horton, the IMF's mission chief for Kazakhstan, told *Bne IntelliNews* Naubet Bisenov in an interview this week that Astana can't rely on high oil prices or strong demand from the country's usual major trading partners – China, Russia, the EU – to save the country's slowing economy. The so-called middle income trap has Kazakhstan snared and the possibility of honest competition in the region – by way of a more engaged and open Uzbekistan – could be the catalyst for getting out of the trap. If Uzbekistan ups its game and improves its policy approaches, Kazakhstan will need to do the same and it will give the region a locus of economic weight in Central Asia that we have not seen before, he says.

The interview has much more about Kazakhstan's specific economic and policy positions, but one theme which emerges is that new and different times may be ahead in Central Asia. A change of leadership in the region's most populous state – Uzbekistan – could open a new marketplace for Kazakhstan as well as add another dynamic player to the regional mix.

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Stalin's Pencil and Central Asia's Borders: Central Asia is plagued by a series of myths, most prominently that of prevailing Islamic extremism. Another, as Alexander Morrison writes for *EurasiaNet* this week, is the particularly persistent trope * that the region is a dangerous powder keg because of the legacy of Soviet borders. Morrison points out several journalistic iterations of the powderkeg theory, in particular those relating to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek violence in the wake of the 2010 Kyrgyz revolution. The problem, he argues, is that such theories – that borders in the region were deliberately drawn to sow instability – suggests that Central Asians are prisoners of their past and lack agency, and also grossly misrepresents that past.

Central Asia's borders might be complex, and they might be problematic, but they were not drawn at random, or without reference to ethnicity, he writes. Morrison deftly pokes into Soviet archives for a more nuanced version of how the Soviet Union drew the region's borders. If anything, Morrison makes the point that while the region's borders can be problematic they are not necessarily a fuse lit by Stalin himself.

Radio and the Region: In a new podcast, the RFE/RL *gang* at Qishloq Ovozi delved into the importance of radio across Central Asia earlier this week in honor of World Radio Day. While it may seem that we are well into the Age of the Internet, radio remains a prime source of news and information for many in Central Asia, and around the world. Much of the region remains dominated by agrarian life and as one of the program's guests, the founder of Tajikistan's independent news

agency Asia-Plus, Umed Babakhanov, noted, people in the field cannot watch TV but they can listen to the radio all day long. Babakhanov, and Bakyt Beshimov, a former Kyrgyz MP, reminisce about radio in Soviet times, covertly listening to Voice of America or the BBC and waiting for Soviet news to finally get around to reporting happenings elsewhere. Babakhanov's 1986 anecdote, about when he and a fellow translator heard on the BBC about the Chernobyl accident and went to their commander to ask about it, is particularly powerful. The commander told them not to listen to foreign voices, it's just a lie. Eventually Soviet media did report on the accident, but foreign radio got the news out quicker.

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