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Kazakhstan Hosts CSTO Military Exercises, Imaginary Adversary Defeated (Rapid Reaction Forces Pass the Test in First Exercise)

SCO Prime Ministers Meet in Beijing, Discuss Economic Cooperation (Massimov Proposes Financial Meeting)

Three-Country Customs Union Nears Legal Completion (Massimov's Meeting with Putin Help Bring Process Closer)

OSCE Chairmanship, A Chance For Kazakhstan to Push Initiatives (Stabilization of Afghanistan Will Be a Priority)

New Astana Arena Hosts First International Match (Kazakhstan Plays Well, Loses to Croatia 1-2)

Kazakhstan Hosts CSTO Military Exercises, Imaginary Adversary Defeated

After two days of intense battles, armed forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) defeated an imaginary adversary in Kazakhstan on October 16 during the final stage of a joint strategic command and staff exercise "Cooperation 2009" of the newly created collective rapid reaction force (RRF).



Kazakh soldiers at the exercises.

Photo by the Press Office of Kazakhstan's Defense Ministry

A total of seven thousands troops from Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia participated in the exercise, using more than 200 pieces of fighting equipment, as well as 60 aircraft.

This was the first exercise of RRF of such magnitude in Kazakhstan since CSTO, which also includes Belarus, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, decided to create a collective rapid reaction force last February. Agreement establishing the

RRF was signed on June 14 in Moscow. Belarus joined in September. Uzbekistan reserved an opportunity to join the agreement later.

Presidents of Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan observed the last day of the exercise at Matybulak firing range in south-eastern Kazakhstan. The leaders also exchanged views on large scale events within RRF and discussed plans to further improve both the structure and overall cooperation within the organization.

The rapid reaction forces' main objectives are to strengthen the security of the CSTO member states against existing and potential threats, including terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking, improve coordination in preventing and eliminating emergency situations of natural and man-made disasters, as well as ensure CSTO's effective participation in maintaining international peace and security.

Strategic command and staff exercise "Cooperation 2009" is the third and final phase of complex military exercises with the participation of military contingents of CSTO member states. The two previous stages were held in Russia and Belarus, in August and September.

Kazakhstan's Defense Minister Adilbek Dzhaksybekov said, "The first command structure of the RRF will be created. It includes representatives of defense, interior and emergencies ministries and security agencies of CSTO member states, as well as the military joint staff and the secretariat of the CSTO. Vasily Rysbaev, the Chief of Staff of Airmobile Forces of Kazakhstan will be appointed RRF Commander."

According to Kazakhstan's Defense Ministry, mechanized infantry and tank units, landing-assault brigade, division artillery and aircraft, as well as special forces, Interior Ministry troops, and a rescue unit of the Emergencies Ministry participated in the "Cooperation 2009" exercise.

All in all, the exercise involved about six thousand troops of the Kazakh Army, more than 200 pieces of equipment, as well as more than 60 bomber, fighter, attack and military transport aircraft, combat and transport helicopters. Russian Federation sent a landing-assault brigade of airborne troops, an artillery brigade, part of the EMERCOM (the Russian Emergencies Ministry) and other units of special purposes. Kyrgyzstan participated by a Scorpion brigade. Armenia sent a rifle company of rapid response, while Belarus sent observers.

CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha said, "The main objective of the training is to iron out the issues of joint tasks. This is the first exercise, and it has a trial character. We look at what we can actually coordinate in terms of the tasks, and we have accumulated a sufficient list of problems that have come out during the preparation for the exercises."

SCO Prime Ministers Meet in Beijing, Discuss Economic Cooperation

Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Karim Massimov participated in the 8th meeting of the heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Beijing October 14 and 15, where officials focused on common actions to combat economic woes their countries face because of the crisis.



Kazakhstan Prime Minister Karim Massimov (L) shakes hands with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during a welcoming ceremony for the SCO Summit.

Massimov suggested holding a meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors of the SCO member states to work out a joint reform of the global financial system and the use of national currencies in payments between SCO countries. The proposal to hold the meeting in Almaty before the end of 2009 received support from all conference participants, and subsequently was approved by Hu Jintao, the Chairman of the People's Republic of China.

Massimov explained Kazakhstan's proposal for a meeting the following way:

“Financial and economic, energy, food and environmental crises, whose effects are felt by all countries without exception, today define the agenda. We need to work efficiently, strengthening cooperation within the organization, helping our economies to overcome the consequences of this serious global crisis and get out of it stronger and more prepared.”

He also spoke of the need for efficient energy supplies throughout the region, whose energy needs are growing and current capacities will not be enough soon.

“The real threat to global energy supply today creates instability in hydrocarbon markets. In order to stabilize the situation in this area we consider it particularly important to form an SCO energy strategy. The principles of long-term, reliable and environmentally sustainable energy supplies at affordable prices to both the exporting and consuming countries should be laid down in its foundation,” Massimov said.

Massimov later met his counterpart, Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin (see story below), Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Igor Chudinov, with whom they discussed the supply of electricity between the two countries, as well as the First Vice President of Iran, Mohammad Reza Rahimi. Massimov urged Rahimi to link Iran to the implementation of Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railway project as soon as possible. Two out of three countries have already started constructing the railway.

During Massimov’s visit, two agreements were signed between Kazakhstan and China.

Kazakhstan’s Samruk-Kazyna Capital Management and Chinese CITIS Capital Holdings LTD agreed to establish a joint investment fund CITIS - Kazyna Investment Fund. The fund is established to finance companies in the non-primary sector of the economy with growth potential, both in Kazakhstan and China. It will finance infrastructure projects. The fund will be managed by a joint management company, consisting of Kazakh and Chinese experts with substantial experience and knowledge of target sectors and industries. In the near future the fund will also open an office in Almaty.

The Samruk-Kazyna Fund and the Chinese Guandong Nuclear Power Corporation (CGNPC) signed another cooperation agreement. The two companies will consider joint ventures for projects to develop wind and solar power in southern and central Kazakhstan, as well as the construction of hydro-electric plants in Kazakhstan.

Another agreement was signed between Zhang Guobao, China’s Deputy Chairman of State Committee on development and reform commission, the head of the State Administration for Energy, and Sauat Mynbayev, Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources of Kazakhstan. It includes two documents, a supplementary agreement to the framework agreement on basic principles of building the second stage of the Kazakhstan-China pipeline and a memorandum on joint development of Urihtau gas field in Western Kazakhstan.

Three-Country Customs Union Nears Legal Completion

Kazakhstan’s Prime Minister Karim Massimov met his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of SCO meeting in Beijing October 14 to discuss progress with the establishment of the Customs Union of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Following a meeting, Massimov said documents creating such a union should be ready for signature by the November summit of the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) in Minsk.

“Next week a delegation from Kazakhstan arrives in Moscow. At a meeting with First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov all documents will be finalized. By the EEC summit in late November, they should be ready for signing, so that the Customs Union, as we agreed, will start functioning on January 1 [2010],” Massimov said.

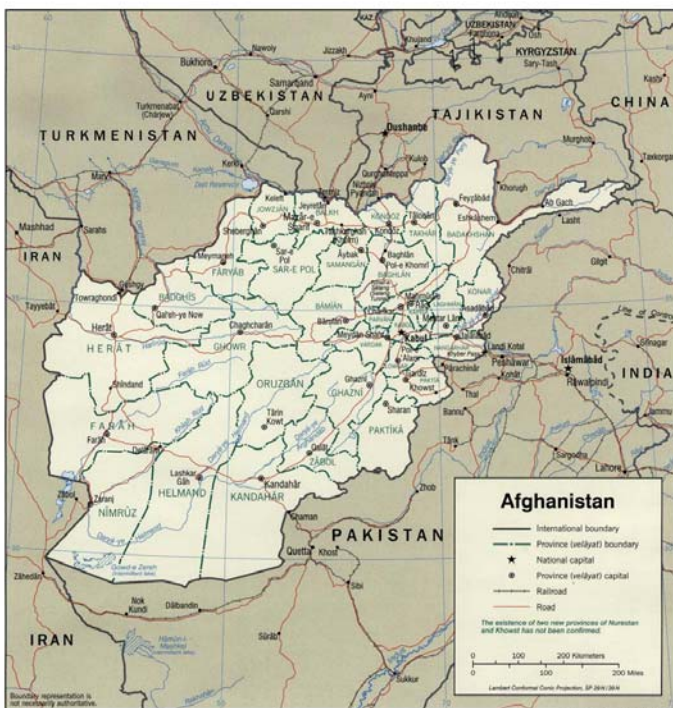
According to the agreements, integration of the three countries into the Customs Union will take place in phases. Starting January 1, 2010, a single customs tariff will start functioning on the territory of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and from July 1, 2010, a Customs Code will come into force. The Customs Union itself should start functioning as of the day of introduction of a single tariff. By mid-2011, it is planned to complete all necessary procedures in creating a single customs territory.

This week Russia will ratify the protocol on the provision of tariff concessions, which transfers all authority to determine benefits to the committee of the Customs Union - the body headed by members of the Government of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. The document provides for the transfer of Customs Union Commission office on the application of higher or lower rates of import duty. The protocol itself was signed by prime ministers of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in December 2008.

According to EEC Secretary General Tair Mansurov, “creating a single customs area will allow participants to increase the GDP of their countries by 2015 by 15 to 18 percent. Besides, costs of waiting at customs posts will be reduced.”

OSCE Chairmanship, A Chance For Kazakhstan to Push Initiatives

Kazakhstan’s upcoming chairmanship in the OSCE next year presents the country with an opportunity to promote its initiatives in the sphere of security, a Kazakh diplomat said.



Alexander Sinyagovsky, an advisor of the Foreign Ministry’s Foreign Policy Analysis and Forecast Committee, an in-house think tank, spoke at a RIA Novosti-sponsored roundtable discussion in Moscow on October 14.

He said Kazakhstan is considering the OSCE as a platform for promoting initiatives in the sphere of security including the improvement of inter-religious tolerance, regional security, including energy and transportation security.

Improving security in Central Asia, and especially the stabilization of neighboring Afghanistan will be amongst the top priorities for Kazakhstan as OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

“The issue of Afghanistan should be addressed to all participants of international relations. This problem should also involve various international organizations. We believe it is necessary to support Russia’s idea to convene, during Kazakhstan’s OSCE chairmanship, meetings between organizations such as CIS, CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization), NATO and the EU to address post-conflict settlement in Afghanistan,” Sinyagovsky said. He also added Kazakhstan is planning to hold an OSCE conference during its chairmanship devoted to the issue of Afghanistan.

New Astana Arena Hosts First International Match

A new Astana Arena in Kazakhstan’s capital became the venue for the first major international football match October 14 as the country’s national squad hosted Croatia for the final match in a series of World Cup qualifiers.

Kazakhstan put up a decent performance, with fast attacks and good defensive play, yet they still lost to Croatia 1-2 due to an injury time header from Tottenham Hotspurs winger Niko Kranjcar. In the first half, Ognjen Vukojevic’s earlier goal had been cancelled out by Kazakhstan’s Sergey Khizhichenko’s shock equalizer.

During a press the conference after the match, Croatia's head coach Slaven Bilic said: “You [in Kazakhstan] have the infrastructure and capabilities in the following 5-7 years to build a good team. I think you should have patience and you will have a strong team”.

Both Kazakhstan and Croatia failed to qualify for the World Cup in South Africa next year. England qualified from the group in the first place, and Ukraine finished as a runner-up with a chance to qualify.



Sergey Khizhniichenko (Kazakhstan) scores a goal.
Photo by "Sports.kz" website

Providing the venue for the match, Astana's new state-of-the-art 30,000-seat football stadium was in the focus of attention. At the end of September, the stadium has been certified by UEFA's team of experts as suitable for major international matches. UEFA's official website has called Astana Arena a "stadium of the future."

Among the stadium's many features is a sliding roof, allowing the conversion from an open air to a closed environment in 20 minutes. This is the sixth stadium in the world with such a roof. Other features include a heated field with an artificial surface with

grass height of the latest generation of 40 mm (1,5748 inches), as well as a sports complex, including gym, gymnastics and martial arts facilities in the basement. There are also separate rooms for reporters, 25 video cameras around the perimeter of the stadium and a parking lot for 1,690 cars.

All special heating arrangements are meant to create favourable conditions for both the players and the audience during Astana's famous winters with temperatures well below freezing. With outside temperatures all the way down to minus 30 degrees centigrade, designers of the stadium have guaranteed inside temperatures of plus 10 degrees Celsius.

"It took two and a half years to complete the project. This is a very complicated object," Sarper Saidam, the manager of the stadium project, said. "A total weight of all metal constructions equals 11,500 tons. Astana Arena is similar to the "Bird's Nest" in Beijing, which hosted the Olympic Games opening in 2008. The Chinese project at first had a closing roof, but was altered because of its complexity. We have installed the construction due to the enthusiasm of the people in Kazakhstan, and now I am proud of my work."



The construction uses Finnish steel that withstands large temperature fluctuations. This makes the construction much safer, taking into account local climatic conditions.

Astana Arena.

Photo by "Today.kz"

"Astana Arena is the flagship of all the stadiums in Kazakhstan," Dzhep Kodzhaman, the construction project leader, said.

Also in the News:

- Kazakhstan's ambassador to NATO Erik Utembayev spoke at NATO headquarters in Brussels this week, urging the dialogue between NATO/EAPC and OSCE. He spoke about the significance of collaborative approaches to solving such problems as the reconstruction of Afghanistan, developing effective tools to addressing "protracted" conflicts, as well as on energy and nuclear safety.
- Ural Mukhamedzhanov, Chairman of the Mazhilis (lower house of parliament) of Kazakhstan, received Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway, Dag Halvorsen. They

noted the trade and economic and cultural ties between the two countries are developing dynamically. Ten Norwegian companies work in Kazakhstan, while the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway was opened in Astana last July.

- Adil Shayakhmetov, First Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan, was elected Supreme Chairman of the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at a meeting of its Council in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on October 16.

Things to Come:

- Prime Minister Karim Massimov will report on the implementation of anti-crisis program and the roadmap at a meeting of the Nur Otan People's Democratic Party October 19.
- The first exhibition of financial products for people "Investfunds Expo Kazakhstan-2009" is taking place in Almaty October 16 and 17, 2009.
- Elections to maslikhats (local assemblies) in 13 regions of Kazakhstan will be held on October 25.



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