

Geopolitical Priority: Eurasian Development

by Rachael Douglas

June 13—The inaugural conference of a new Central Asia Expert Club on Eurasian Development was held yesterday in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. It was chaired by Sayfullo Safarov, deputy director of the official Tajikistan Center for Strategic Studies, and addressed by Yuri Krupnov, chairman of the Supervisory Board of Russia's Institute for Demography, Migration and Regional Development (IDMRD).

The IDMRD program for Central Asian development, "A New Generation of Alternative Development Programs for the Elimination of Drug Production in Afghanistan," had been unveiled by Krupnov March 25 at a Moscow meeting on "Alternative Development for Drug-Producing Regions," hosted by Russian Federal Drug Control Service (FDSC) Director Victor Ivanov (see *EIR*, April 4, 2014).

Regionwide Collaboration

Since the March conference, the IDMRD team has been building support for the program. On May 28-29, Krupnov addressed a conference on "Pakistan's Strategic Environment: Post-2014," held by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute. His report there, "A Russian and Central Asian View of the Prospects for Pakistan and Afghanistan," put forward the "project approach" to economic development of the region.

Calling for "new, secondary industrialization in Central Asia as the basis for Eurasian integration," Krupnov wrote on his website about yesterday's Dushanbe conference: "With the global economic crisis and the tense geopolitical situation, cooperation may unite not only countries of the former Soviet Union, but also greater Central Asia, including Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran." Representatives of the Embassies of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the charter members of the new Eurasian Economic Union, also addressed the meeting.

"Central Asia is a key staging ground for Eurasian integration," said Krupnov, noting that Tajikistan itself borders on almost all the other countries of the region. He urged Tajikistan to cooperate with Russia on the future of Afghanistan: "One should not nurture illusions that Tajikistan could launch industrialization on its own. Only close industrial cooperation with central Russia, specifically southern Siberia, can uplift its national economy. Tajikistan can be a leader in secondary industrialization, becoming a staging ground for crash industrialization in Afghanistan," replacing the drug economy there. Four key areas would be agricultural implements and food-processing machinery production; transportation infrastructure; rapid construction of a string of hydroelectric power plants on the Panj River; science and technical education programs.

To finance such development, Krupnov played up the potential role of the Corporation for Central Asian Development Cooperation, proposed by Ivanov two years ago, and now being promoted by the FDSC, as a "system integrator" for the various investment projects that are under discussion. Coverage of the Dushanbe event by the official Russian news agency Itar-Tass highlighted this aspect, noting, "The creation of the corporation on the basis of Vnesheconombank has been proposed by ... Victor Ivanov ... [and] approved by the State Duma Committee for CIS Affairs and Ties with Compatriots."

The state-owned Vnesheconombank, or VEB Bank, is Russia's second-largest bank, and has been authorized at President Putin's initiative to handle the investment of resources from the National Welfare Fund into some infrastructure projects.

Preventive Measures

Itar-Tass also characterized the meeting as a discussion of "preventive measures to ward off the Ukrainian scenario in the region." Speakers said that it is urgent to "intensify Eurasian cooperation and build a strong geopolitical system in order to avoid Ukrainian events and work out preventive measures for that purpose," according to the news agency.

On June 17 and 19, Dushanbe will also be the site of two meetings of officials from anti-drug agencies of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization countries, the first at the senior expert level and the second bringing together the heads of the agencies.