

Kyrgyz Fear Shifting Boundaries

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The Batken region, a sliver of land sandwiched between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is currently the focus of heated debate about what some see as a creeping annexation of Kyrgyz territory.

As in other parts of the Fergana Valley, national borders wind in and out of difficult terrain, and in places have yet to be formally demarcated by the post-Soviet states. When the lines come to be officially marked out on the ground, the ethnicity of local communities will be an important factor – and there are fears in Kyrgyzstan is that the population balance is tipping away from the locals.

As Kyrgyz in Batken have left their homes in search of better prospects elsewhere, Tajiks have moved in to take their place, buying up disused houses and land. Many former Kyrgyz villages are becoming Tajik, which could result in a loss of territory when the maps are redrawn and the villages are allocated to Tajikistan.

“A total of 600 hectares of land have been settled by Tajiks, so that this area has become disputed,” Abduvali Hamraev, deputy head of Batken’s Leylek district, said.

Some locals say they had no choice but to sell their homes cheap when their neighbours did so and Tajiks began to predominate in the village.

They complain that although the government of Kyrgyzstan is now building schools and other infrastructure in rural Batken, such assistance comes too late to improve life there and stem the exodus of villagers.

An additional problem is that roads through Batken follow the most obvious route, often ignoring the national frontiers that only started to matter after Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan became separate states in 1991. Locals say their children are harassed when they cross through Tajik territory on their way to school, and they themselves are hassled at border and police checkpoints.

There are plans to build a three-kilometre road that will connect different parts of Leylek district without going through Tajikistan.

(For a 2009 report on this issue, see [Kyrgyz, Tajiks Place High Value on Scrap of Land](#).)

The audio programme, in Russian and Kyrgyz, went out on national radio stations in Kyrgyzstan, as part of IWPR project work funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Location: [Tajikistan](#)
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Focus: [Central Asia Radio](#)

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