

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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Analytical Articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,100 and 1,500 words. The articles are structured as follows:

KEY ISSUE: A short 75-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-450 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: <scornell@jhu.edu> and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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EUROPEAN UNION HOLDS FOREIGN-MINISTERIAL CONSULTATIONS WITH THE CENTRAL ASIAN GROUP

Robert M. Cutler

In early April, Uzbekistan hosted the most recent EU-Central Asia ministerial meeting, where a high-level delegation from Brussels met with the foreign ministers of all five Central Asian countries and took the opportunity to hold one-to-one bilateral meetings with each of them. For the first time, energy has appeared in a significant place in the formal definition of the agenda for discussion at this level and in this forum. While the preparation and overall tenor of the meetings reflect a somewhat better sense of purpose on the part of Brussels, the EU's policy remains plagued by difficulties of goal definition and bureaucratic coordination.

BACKGROUND: The European Union's relations with Central Asia date from the break-up of the Soviet Union, with which it had signed a Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) in 1989. Beginning in the early 1990s, bilateral relations with the USSR's successor states in Central Asia were directed largely through the Technical Assistance to the CIS (TACIS) program. From 1991 through 2006, the EU spent over US\$ 2 billion in Central Asia despite acute criticism from the EU's own program evaluators for overfunding Western consultants to the detriment of real projects on the ground.

Over time the EU negotiated Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), including not only trade and economic cooperation but also fields such as environment and culture, with most of the Central Asian states. In 1999, the PCAs with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan entered into force. The PCA with Tajikistan was signed in 2004 but the failure of various parties to ratify the agreement delayed its entry into force until 2010; the Turkmenistan agreement was signed in 1998 and still awaits ratification by all parties.

It was in fact the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City that first really focused the EU's attention on the region. Still, the EU did not itself take measures immediately in response to the events although its member states did so individually. It was the May 2005 civil unrest in Uzbekistan that led the EU to decide on a deeper engagement. The post of EU Special Representative for Central Asia was created in July 2005 and filled by Pierre Morel, who was tasked with coordinating the efforts of all EU actors in the implementation of a new EU approach to Central Asia.

Morel's brief included a differentiated approach to the various countries in the region according to the given policy area (such as rule of law, environment, water and education) and also with helping to organize the individual EU members' high-level meetings with the countries concerned. When Russia embargoed natural gas exports to Ukraine in early 2006, the EU was compelled to note that much of that gas originally came from Turkmenistan. Brussels then launched a deliberation process that culminated in the July 2007 promulgation of the EU's new "Strategy for a New Partnership with



Central Asia”, which forms the basis for the EU’s Regional Assistance Strategy to Central Asia (RASCA). It defined three priority areas: (1) promotion of regional cooperation and good-neighborly relations, (2) poverty reduction and increasing living standards, and (3) good governance and economic reform. Roughly one-third of the assistance was intended to promote multilateral cooperation with Central Asia as well as Central Asian regional cooperation with the South Caucasus and with the EU itself.

IMPLICATIONS: While Morel’s appointment in 2005 was a positive indication of the EU’s wish to engage Central Asia, it came eight years after Members of the European Parliament had first pointed to the need for the EU to become more deeply involved with the region. Yet even that appointment was subsequently undercut by Lady Catherine Ashton, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR-FASP), since that office was created in December 2009. She has proposed to abolish all posts of Special Representative as a move to consolidate her office’s control of the then non-existent European External Action

Service (essentially the EU’s foreign service), and she has since relented.

Ashton’s missteps are symptomatic of the lack of coordination that continues to plague the EU’s policy in Central Asia. For example, her office’s disconnect from the crucial question of energy strategy is striking. Although she at first asserted such a competence (which would in fact make

better sense), she had to be reminded that it is in fact assigned to EU energy commissioner Gunther Oettinger. The public tension between the two caused further embarrassment to Ashton. In the event, the EU commissioner for development Andris Piebalgs, himself formerly energy commissioner, nevertheless participated in the April meeting in Tashkent. Meanwhile, the EU’s once-vaunted TRACECA program for energy infrastructure development around the Caspian Sea littoral has been moribund for years.

The EU has undertaken Human Rights Dialogues with the various Central Asian states, with mixed results. It does not have a strategic vision and tends to be driven by events and individual circumstances. However, the EU lacks much leverage in this area and limits itself to the exchange of information and confidence building. The involvement of Central Asian civil society representatives is spotty and often limited to seminar participation. Such organizations remain beholden to institutional restraints by their national regimes (such as

Uzbekistan's infamous banking restriction rules) after the EU representatives have gone home.

The EU initiative towards Central Asia in the education field has had more substance than those in other fields. It has specific and prioritized goals, but it remains little more than a compartmentalized collection of pre-existing activities. It bears noting further that the European Parliament continues to hold bilateral meetings with delegations of parliamentarians from countries in the region under the aegis of its international Parliamentary Cooperation Committees (PCCs). However, there is no evident attempt to coordinate the activities of the PCCs with the HR-FASP's activities or the European Commission more broadly.

CONCLUSIONS: The agenda of the Tashkent meeting reflected the difficulty of coordinating various relatively autonomous EU instances, and the overall lack of direction of the policy despite the existence of programmatic documents. RASCA's first implementation disaggregated the three original priority areas into as many as sixteen policy areas, only to re-aggregate them into seven issues that, in turn, bore only passing connections to those identified in the original Regional Strategy Paper (RSP). Within those seven, the EU subsequently identified three priority initiatives for 2007-2010 that still radically differed from and effectively superseded the RSP's normative direction. Those priorities have shifted still further in the triennial plan for 2011 through 2013, which now defines energy, environment, and the promotion of business cooperation networks (including small and medium enterprises) as the priorities under the newly-

invented umbrella rubric of "sustainable regional development" for Central Asia.

Having eschewed a real presence in Central Asia until recently, the EU will continue to flounder in the search for a way to balance such powers as Russia, China and the U.S. for whom the region is also of major interest. Following Nursultan Nazarbaev's recent landslide reelection as president of Kazakhstan, Ashton contradicted OSCE criticisms by congratulating the Kazakhstani people "for making their voice heard". At the same time it was made known through media leaks that discussions were under way about the possibility of an "advanced" partnership agreement to bring EU-Kazakhstan relations to a new level. Nevertheless, truly strategic action is foreclosed until the EU is able to define its real interests unambiguously and follow through with implementation that does not change their identification and enumeration every time a new programmatic document is drafted. At the same time, the EU will have to find a way to avoid the danger of the Strategy becoming a device for simply pigeonholing an eclectic collection of programs lacking comprehensive direction.

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PROTAGONISTS REBUILD THEIR POLITICAL FOUNDATIONS FOLLOWING SPLIT IN CHECHNYA'S REBEL ORGANIZATION

Kevin Daniel Leahy

The dust has yet to settle entirely following the leadership controversy last August which pitted the putative leader of the Caucasus Emirate, Doku Umarov, against a group of erstwhile colleagues in Chechnya's rebel organisation. Umarov's steadfast refusal to relinquish his leadership position has not prevented his opponents in Chechnya from restructuring themselves politically and militarily. The leaders of this anti-Umarov constituency command sizeable support and can call upon the services of a number of militarily gifted field commanders. Conversely, support for Umarov within the Chechen organisation appears to be insignificant; is there a way for Umarov to redress this state of affairs?

BACKGROUND: It is nine months since Doku Umarov provoked a sharp difference of opinion within Chechnya's rebel organisation by refusing to relinquish his position as Emir of the Caucasus Emirate. Umarov's prevarication upset many within the organization in Chechnya and several senior field commanders – Hussein Gakayev, Tarhan Gaziyeu and Aslanbek Vadalov – felt obligated to complain publicly about his continued stewardship of the Caucasus Emirate. Following the outbreak of this controversy, it became fashionable among analysts and observers to refer to the complainants as dissidents, as though they were representatives of a minority point of view within Chechnya's rebel organisation. It has become apparent, however, that by voicing their opposition to Umarov's continued leadership, Gakayev, Gaziyeu and Vadalov were in fact speaking for a majority within Chechnya's rebel organization.

While Gakayev and his fellow complainants insist that their objections to Umarov's continued leadership are rooted in the latter's failure to adhere to long-established standard

operating procedures – his alleged failure to convene the Majlis al-Shura on a regular basis, for example – it is now clear that there was considerably more popular disquiet about Umarov's 2007 proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate than was initially thought. Gakayev and his supporters seem to have no fundamental problem with the idea of Chechnya being subsumed into a virtual Caucasus Emirate, which also includes the jurisdictions we recognise today as Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Yet it is clear that many of Umarov's countrymen were not pleased with the unilateral manner in which the decision to proclaim the Emirate was arrived at.

According to Gakayev, the basis for his opposition to Umarov is the latter's failure to lead by consensus. Umarov's decision to proclaim the Caucasus Emirate in late 2007 was taken, Gakayev complains, "without consulting all of the Mujahedeen". Gakayev argues that such a monumental initiative should have been put before the rebels' Majlis al-Shura for extended deliberation. Umarov took the



Doku Umarov

decision to proclaim the Emirate on foot of consultations he held with a narrow circle of advisors, very few of whom were in harmony with the main body of opinion within Chechnya's rebel organisation.

Gakayev paints a picture of Umarov as an autocrat, indifferent to the collective will of the Majlis al-Shura. By ignoring this institution, Gakayev argues, Umarov has exempted his leadership from accountability and oversight. "If a person ignores the Majlis, if a person is not advised by his brothers, then such a person does not deserve to be Emir", Gakayev concludes.

IMPLICATIONS: Gakayev now styles himself as the Emir of Chechnya (or the Vilayat of Nokhchicho, in rebel parlance) and has convened a new Majlis which includes field commanders from throughout Chechnya. Naturally Gakayev is included in this body, as are Gaziyeu (Gakayev's deputy) and Vadalov (commander of the Eastern Front). The Arab fighter Muhannad is also a member of the new Majlis, though in what capacity he is included – as the figurehead of the foreign Mujahedeen in Chechnya or as commander of the Western Front – is an open question. Muhannad has

been identified by Umarov as being chiefly responsible for the current discord within the rebel ranks. At the time of writing, unconfirmed reports were circulating that Muhannad had been killed on April 21 during a confrontation with pro-Russian forces in Chechnya's Shali district.

Six sector commanders are also included in the Majlis, three from the Western Front and three from the

Eastern Front. Emirs Zumso, Abu Muslim and Abdullah represent the West, while Mahran, Muslim and Zaurbek represent the East. Practically nothing is known about Emir Zumso other than the fact that he was previously under the command of Tarkhan Gaziyeu as part of the now-defunct South-Western Front. Abdullah and Abu Muslim have also been associated with Gaziyeu. Available information about these two field commanders and their respective backgrounds is negligible and contradictory.

Quite a bit more is known about the respective records and backgrounds of the sector commanders from the Eastern Front. Emir Mahran, (real name Mahran Saidov) is a particularly active guerrilla leader who commands the Tsentoroi sector of operations in Chechnya's Gudermes district. Emir Muslim, or Muslim 'Dunga' Gakayev, is in charge of the Shali sector of operations in eastern Chechnya. He is the younger brother of Hussein Gakayev and has in recent years been one of those responsible for the recruitment and training of suicide bombers. Emir Zaurbek, or Zaurbek Avdorkhanov, is the younger brother of

Akhmed Avdorkhanov, killed in 2005. Akhmed Avdorkhanov was a close associate of the late Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov. Emir Zaurbek is a successful guerrilla commander in his own right who operates mainly in the Kurchaloi and Nozhai-yurt districts. Along with Vadalov, Mahran and Avdorkhanov planned and executed the attack on Ramzan Kadyrov's compound in the village of Tsentoroi last August.

It is clear, therefore, that the Gakayev-Vadalov-Gaziyevev axis enjoys considerable support from Chechnya's rebel rank and file. But how much support does Umarov continue to enjoy?

The case of Emir Ilman (Ilman Estemirov) merits attention in this context. Estemirov was the Emir of the rebels' Tevzana sector in Chechnya's Vedeno District. In August 2010 he had been included on a list of Chechen field commanders allegedly opposed to Doku Umarov. This list was posted on the Daymohk.org website which has taken Gakayev's side in the recent controversy. The integrity of this compilation has been called into question in recent weeks. According to certain rebel sources, Ilman was killed on March 28 in the Ingush village of Upper Alkun, during the same special operation that accounted for Umarov's deputy, the Chechen ideologue Supyan Abdullayev. Does this indicate that Emir Ilman was actually in league with Umarov at the time of his death? Was he playing a double game, adopting an equivocal stance by staying on terms with both parties? Or could it be that he was present in Abdullayev's camp as Gakayev's emissary, with the mission of soothing relations between the two factions?

Emir Ilman's presence among the casualties of the raid on Upper Alkun suggests that Umarov will continue to exert influence within

Chechnya's rebel community until such time as he is killed. Furthermore, this apparent inaccuracy in the internet list mentioned earlier suggests that there may be other field commanders who are still reluctant to commit themselves to either party. Assuming it exists, should Umarov begin canvassing this undecided constituency aggressively, there is a possibility that he might broaden his support base substantially.

CONCLUSIONS: It is difficult to see how Umarov might be reconciled with Gakayev and his followers, although one should note that he is an extremely resourceful individual and that the political fault lines demarcating this conflict have proven notoriously inconstant in the past. It is certain, however, that Gakayev and his allies now represent the most influential rebel constituency currently active inside Chechnya. Gakayev's supporters hope that his will be a more inclusive regime where decisions of strategic significance will be reached by way of a more collegial process.

For his part, Umarov may attempt to rescue his dwindling legitimacy by appointing himself, or one of his supporters, to the vacant position of Emir of Ingushetia. It should be noted that opposition to Umarov's rule has largely been confined to the rebel organisation in Chechnya, with branches in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria hastening to reaffirm their loyalty to him. Throughout his career, Umarov has shown himself to be a skilled courtier; with some lower ranked field commanders uncertain, or perhaps indifferent, as to whom they should support, Umarov may yet be able to rescue his foundering leadership.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree from University College Cork, Ireland.

AFGHANISTAN'S TRADE WITH CENTRAL ASIA REVIVES

Nicklas Norling

A milestone has been reached in Afghanistan. For the first time in almost a century, Afghanistan's regional trading network is up and running after the Soviet border split the region in 1917 and Afghan tradesmen are now trading with partners in all directions. Recent data from Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organization (CSO) suggests that Afghanistan's licit trade with the Central Asian republics is now surpassing trade with Pakistan and India. The U.S. State Department ingeniously reorganized itself already in 2005-2006 into a South and Central Asia Bureau to promote these ties. Reality has now caught up with bureaucratic administration, but the process of building further on it leaves much to be wanted.

BACKGROUND: Former U.S. national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski once labeled the South and Central Asia region as an “arc of crisis”. Seeking to transform this prevailing dystopic vision, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2005 launched a campaign to reconnect the two regions into an “arc of opportunity”. It was anticipated that investments into Afghanistan's road network, bridges, and cross-border connections with the former Soviet Central Asian republics in the north held greater prospects than any other of fuelling regional and continental trade. Trade, it was believed, could provide Afghanistan with the lifeblood and economic growth it needs to stand on its own and, hence, survive as a state.

By the time of the implementation of Rice's strategy, Afghanistan's trade volumes with its northern neighbors in Central Asia were close to zero. Infrastructural links to the former Soviet lands were few and far between, forcing Afghanistan to rely almost exclusively on Pakistan for trade and transit. Given the entrenched nature of these ties, skeptic participants at a 2006 Kabul Conference on transport and trade in greater Central Asia scoffed at the potential of reviving the dormant

links with former Soviet Central Asia. “They no longer know each other, and they don't want to”, said one participant.

This is now not only happening, it is exceeding even the most optimistic prognoses. In 2009/2010, Afghanistan's total trade with the Central Asian Republics amounted to US\$ 1,244 million, China and Japan US\$ 697 million, and the rest of the South Asian region US\$ 681 million, according to Afghanistan's CSO. Broken down by country, the total trade volume between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan has grown from US\$ 74 million in 2007/2008 to US\$ 165 million in 2008/2009, to top US\$ 291 million in 2009/2010 (US\$ 364 million according to Kazakh statistics), almost all of which are made up of Kazakh exports to Afghanistan. Up until 2005 these volumes often did not exceed US\$ 20 million.

Still stronger trading ties are being built with Uzbekistan. For much of the 2000s Afghanistan-Uzbekistan trade did not even enter into the statistics. Now, Afghan imports from Uzbekistan exceed US\$ 876 million, up from US\$ 167 million in 2007/2008 and figures below US\$ 100 million prior to that. Meanwhile, imports from Pakistan have



(Reuters)

decreased over the past three years from US\$ 431 million in 2007/2008 to US\$ 308 million in 2009/2010, which is about equal to imports from China, reaching US\$ 360 million in 2009/2010. True, Afghanistan's exports are still heavily directed toward Pakistani markets and from 2005 to 2010 the value of this trade has remained in the bracket between US\$ 200 million and US\$ 300 million.

Critics may raise two potential objections to these new data. A first objection is that the abovementioned figures do not include shuttle trade, which IMF figures do. When shuttle trade is included, Afghanistan's trade with Pakistan reached a whopping US\$ 1.9 billion in 2009, which is significantly higher than the CSO's statistics. While such trade is surely important for the Afghan population it does not bring income to the government. It also obscures the licit trade and transit that is being developed between Afghanistan and its neighbors. In any case, trade with Central Asia is rapidly approaching even the high level of US\$ 1.9 billion.

A second potential objection is that these new trading dynamics are merely epiphenomena of the opening of the so-called Northern Distribution Network (NDN), supplying U.S. and NATO troops with materiel through Central Asia, in 2009. Critics should have in mind that even in 2008/2009 – prior to the opening of NDN – total trade with the CARs amounted to US\$ 747 million and in 2007/2008 to US\$ 300 million. Even if parts of the current trade may be connected to NDN there are clearly other dynamics at work unrelated to the transit of war supplies. In short, it is unmistakable that U.S. strategy works.

IMPLICATIONS: Several implications are to be derived from this development. At the most basic level, expanding trading ties and decreasing transportation costs imply that more goods become tradable, bringing cheaper and more diverse products to Afghans. Sizeable customs revenues also accrue the Afghan government as customs duties in 2009/2010 made up around 3 percent of GDP, equaling an income of at least US\$ 400 million. What is the U.S. government's response to these recent successes? The truth is that the regional dimension seems to have vanished altogether. For example, the Obama administration left out the entire sphere of economic development and regional trade from the White House's 2010 Afghanistan Policy Review.

To put policy back on track, three steps are called for. First, the regional trading network is up and running but Afghanistan currently has little export capacity, and the U.S. must promote it. Building on Afghanistan's export

potential in natural resources is the way forward. As Afghanistan develops its vast energy and mineral resources, valued at US\$ 1 trillion by audits, export markets are available in China, India, and elsewhere with transit available via the Central Asian republics and Afghanistan's southern neighbors. This is the only policy with any realistic chances of bringing the government of Afghanistan the income stream needed to cover its budget deficits and to afford the military and police now being trained.

Second, the U.S. must emphasize that its strategy for Afghanistan is regional in scope and dust off the strategy of 2005-2006. Landlocked Afghanistan has been suffocated in the absence of regional trade, which is now reemerging. Afghanistan's success depends on events beyond its borders and the active promotion of the synergies which exist at the regional level. Much of this is already happening bilaterally but U.S. coordination is called for since there is no other neutral broker with sufficient power and resources to play this role. In principle, this is no different from U.S. leadership in post-World War II Europe – and the lack thereof in the interwar period. Regional countries are expecting a storekeeper willing to provide the collective leadership required. Once such coordination has been set up among regional countries, and the countries involved realize the value of it, they will, just like the European countries, have a vested interest in maintaining it on their own.

Third, the U.S. government should undertake a public relations campaign to announce this milestone in relevant information outlets and give due recognition to all the Afghans, Americans, Japanese, and others who have helped restore this millennia-old trading zone.

The sunk costs in this network have already been paid and there is no sensible reason why the U.S. government should diminish its accomplishments. At a minimum they testify to the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan being half-full rather than half-empty, and that a prosperous Afghanistan is surely within reach.

CONCLUSIONS: The U.S. has just achieved its first real strategic success in Afghanistan but the present administration is yet to acknowledge it, let alone act on it. To inject further fuel into regional trade, the U.S. must not stand idly by but promote Afghan mining and export of natural resources. This should be complemented by U.S. leadership on a regional level similar to what was required to assemble the belligerent European countries after World War II.

Winston Churchill once said, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on". This is, perhaps, more relevant for the U.S. in Afghanistan than ever. The U.S. is suffering from a recognition deficit in Afghanistan and lacks goodwill ammunition against Koran burnings and other uncontrollable setbacks. The U.S. role in restoring the greatest pride of Afghanistan, its trading culture and pivotal position on the ancient Silk Roads, is perhaps a good place to start. This would give more credibility to U.S. efforts and administrative reorganizations, reify its role as a champion of this innovative thinking, and strengthen its place among Afghans as the visionary country we know.

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SOCAR-DEPA GAS DEAL FAVORS ITGI AS AZERBAIJAN'S STRATEGIC CHOICE

Gulmira Rzaeva

The recent SOCAR-DEPA gas deal demonstrated Greece's and Azerbaijan's political support for ITGI at the highest level. The gas sale contract to Greece via Turkey implies the official opening of the Southern Corridor, and that the long-awaited strategic choice of SOCAR and the Shah Deniz Consortium will likely be ITGI and TAP. Thus, the Southern Gas Corridor could open with these two projects instead of Nabucco. The EU should encourage the ITGI and Nabucco consortia to cooperate in securing Azerbaijani gas for both projects so that the Southern Corridor can start with ITGI southward in a first phase and then follow Nabucco's planned route northward to Austria in a second phase.

BACKGROUND: On April 5, Greece's national gas company DEPA and Azerbaijan's State Oil Company SOCAR signed a long-awaited Memorandum of Understanding during an official visit by the Greek President Karolos Papoulias to Azerbaijan. According to the MoU "Botaş, DEPA and SOCAR agreed to consider the assignment of Botaş' rights and obligations under the Botaş-DEPA gas sales contract to the entity in Azerbaijan (SOCAR or Azerbaijan Gas Sale Company AGSC) subject to the relevant parties' consent". Thus, Botaş may approve to re-assign the Botaş-DEPA gas sale contract to SOCAR or AGSC, following the signature of the contract between Botaş and SOCAR in June 2010.

With the tacit approval of Turkey, Caspian gas will now flow to European markets directly from a Caspian gas producer – Azerbaijan. The physical transportation route of Azerbaijani gas to Greece will run through the Turkey-Greece Interconnector (ITG), connecting the natural gas networks of Turkey and Greece since 2007. There will in practice be no new supply to Greece, but rather the reassignment of an existing supply contract between Botaş and DEPA. Greece will initially require 500-700 million cubic meters (mcm) of Azerbaijani gas

per year, with the possibility of increasing the amount significantly during the contract term to fill any emergent gap between supply and demand. The structural demand trend for gas in Greece remains upward and by 2015 annual demand is forecast to rise to between 5.7 billion cubic meters (bcm) and 8.1 bcm from 3.5 bcm in 2010, according to the Greek regulator RAE. Currently, the lion's share of Greece's gas imports – 66 percent – is provided by Russian Gazprom, which has a contract to supply 3 bcm annually to DEPA via Bulgaria. This contract will run out in 2016. Of the remaining annual gas imports, 760 mcm is composed of Algerian LNG imported to Greece's LNG terminal Revithoussa, while another 500 mcm comes from Botaş. However, the supply/demand balance in Greece will be disturbed if all its proposed additional gas-fired power generation is implemented over the next few years. If that happens, larger volumes need to be imported from other sources to secure the balance.

Of particular importance for DEPA is to position Greece as a gas transit country between gas-producing Azerbaijan and gas-consuming countries in the EU and Southeastern Europe, an objective clearly stated in the Memorandum. This ambition will bring



some commercial and transit dividends to Greece, which is still recovering from the financial crisis. The construction of the interconnector Greece-Bulgaria with a total capacity of 5 bcm has started and it is expected that the 140 million Euro-project will be completed by 2013. With the help of the Greece-Italy Interconnector and/or TAP, Greece could also be the entry point of up to 12 bcm of Azerbaijani gas per year to Albania and Italy if all these projects are implemented. Macedonia, which is currently 100 percent dependent on Russian gas, will also be able to benefit from gas sourced from Azerbaijan via Greece with the help of the existing Greece-Macedonia Interconnector.

IMPLICATIONS: It has been almost a year since SOCAR opened negotiations with European gas buyers within the Southern Gas Corridor – this process began immediately after

the Azerbaijan-Turkey agreement was signed in June 2010. The negotiations have focused on determining which buyers will provide the most valuable commercial offers, and which of the three transportation routes through Turkey to Europe will provide the most viable transportation tariffs and conditions. Although the EU officially supports all three projects of the Southern Corridor

equally, Nabucco is described as the most strategically important pipeline as it has the largest capacity of 31 bcm annually and is specifically intended to lessen Eastern and Central Europe's dependence on Russian gas. Thus, the EU would prefer to see the promised 10 bcm of Azerbaijani gas output available for export in the western direction after 2017 (when the second phase of Shah Deniz will come on stream) directed toward Nabucco rather than ITGI or TAP. There are no such strategic preferences for Azerbaijan, which is interested in all profitable commercial offers and is moreover very keen to access the nearest gas markets directly. The EU is anxiously awaiting SOCAR's decision on "Shah Deniz 10".

Either Nabucco or ITGI can provide such an opportunity for SOCAR. Through Nabucco, SOCAR could have direct access to its

prospected participants and more Balkan countries could also be linked to the pipeline. On the other hand, if ITGI is chosen, SOCAR can access the lucrative Italian market with an annual gas consumption of up to 78 bcm, apart from the east and west Balkan Interconnectors to Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania and Serbia via Greece. Up to 30 percent of hydrocarbons consumed in Italy come from North African energy producers and the Middle East. It remains to be seen how the European market will react to the political turmoil in these important energy exporter countries. Certainly Libya, one of the largest hydrocarbon producers in the region, has moved from stability to a highly unstable state in recent months. This could be a good opportunity for SOCAR to enter the Italian market, replace potentially unreliable gas exporters, and strengthen its position there for years to come. ITGI and/or TAP is the easiest and shortest way to reach the Italian market.

The recent statement by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on the prospects for accessing the Italian market through South Stream via the Balkans and under the Ionian Sea encouraged both Athens and Baku to sign the Memo. Presently, Russia and Algeria each supply roughly 23 bcm per year to Italy. Additional Russian gas entering the Italian market via South Stream would likely lessen SOCAR's opportunities for accessing Italy. However, it is not yet entirely clear how the gas for South Stream will be supplied. As currently proposed it will also be one of the most expensive pipelines ever built at a cost of 23 billion Euros. Thus, project financing may also be a challenge.

CONCLUSIONS: With the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between

SOCAR and DEPA, Azerbaijan and Greece demonstrated their political support for ITGI and TAP. It is clearly stated in the Memo that the "SOCAR-DEPA gas sale contract to Greece, via Turkey, will serve, among others, as a breakthrough movement for the establishment of direct energy links between Azerbaijan and Greece" and most importantly "an official opening of the Southern Corridor". Thus, the Southern Corridor will start with ITGI and TAP instead of Nabucco. The EU should encourage the ITGI and Nabucco consortiums to work together in securing Azerbaijani gas so that both projects can come on stream within the Southern Corridor, starting with ITGI southward in a first phase and then follow Nabucco's original planned route northwards to Austria in a second phase.

Azerbaijan clearly aims to become one of the main players in the European gas market after 2017 when Shah Deniz 2 will come on stream. However, Azerbaijan is a new and small player, which has to make its way in a highly competitive market. It neither expects special political treatment, nor any monopolistic position. SOCAR's target is to access multiple buyers, multiple pipelines, and multiple transportation routes both inside and outside the region. Azerbaijan wants to gain importance to the EU as an energy state – it wants to build a reputation as a reliable supplier and commercially focused partner rather than as a player of ultimately pointless geopolitical games.

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FIELD REPORTS

TURKISH ELECTIONS COULD OPEN WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY IN TURKISH-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

Armen Grigoryan

The upcoming parliamentary elections in Turkey should clarify whether Turkish-Armenian relations may improve in a short-term perspective, opening for a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and regional cooperation in the South Caucasus. Regardless of the outcome of the elections, it will clarify the fate of the Turkish-Armenian protocols signed in October 2009. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AKP party seems capable of securing a majority in the newly elected parliament and to form a new government. After the elections, the AKP will not be under the threat of instantly losing the support of voters due to opposition criticism, so its leadership may consider the ratification of the protocols safer.

Such a decisive move followed by an opening of the border, without explicitly linking the normalization of relations with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process, would change the regional situation radically. The Turkish opposition and Azerbaijan's government, which have opposed normalization, do not believe that Armenia will become more willing to make concessions if Turkish-Armenian relations are normalized. However, such thinking does not take into account that Armenia's excessive dependence on Russia is the main issue requiring a solution.

When the normalization process came to a standstill, Russia easily persuaded Armenia to extend its basing rights. An agreement was signed in August 2010, during President Medvedev's visit to Yerevan. In general, events during recent years have shown that the policy of isolating Armenia and the militaristic rhetoric of Azerbaijani officials

will not bring about progress in the conflict resolution process on Nagorno-Karabakh through unilateral concessions from the Armenian side. Instead, Russia's and to a certain extent Iran's influence has been growing continuously.

At the same time, the internal political situation in Armenia, where the opposition has been organizing mass demonstrations demanding extraordinary presidential and parliamentary elections, as well as a complete failure of the financial and economic policy of the Armenian government should be taken into account. The weak legitimacy of President Sargsyan's administration may induce him to seek international support and financial assistance. An opening of the Turkish-Armenian border would allow Sargsyan to save face and avoid criticism from the opposition and Armenian Diaspora for being "defeatist". Before the standstill, Sargsyan had enjoyed the image of a realistic politician trying to put an end to a decades-long enmity and could make use of it again. It is telling that although the ratification of the protocols by Armenia's National Assembly was suspended in 2010, Sargsyan has not called off his signature despite the opposition urging him to do so by.

An opening of the border would reduce internal political tension in Armenia, as it would partly relieve the economic hardship that the country's population is experiencing. Besides, the possibility of transport communication via Turkish territory would reduce Armenia's dependence on Russia and promote mutual trust. Therefore, it would ultimately benefit also Azerbaijan and Georgia. Better opportunities to maneuver independently

from Russia and seeking further international assistance for legitimating his rule would stimulate Sargsyan and the ruling coalition to be more flexible on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

At the same time, Sargsyan should not be considered a politician with truly progressive views. His approach is rather opportunistic. If the newly formed Turkish government refuses to ratify the protocols, Sargsyan will most probably seek legitimacy by playing to nationalist sentiments. By denouncing the protocols and actively exploiting the genocide issue politically, Sargsyan could secure the support of all factions of the National Assembly and mobilize the active support of the Diaspora.

In summary, the window of opportunity for normalizing Turkish-Armenian relations and stimulating regional cooperation in the South Caucasus will be open for quite a short time after the elections in Turkey. If the issue is not solved promptly, pressure by the opposition will very soon

motivate Sargsyan to start advocating more hardcore nationalist policies. In fact, the 20th anniversary of independence in September could become a convenient starting point. It should also be remembered that sensitive issues such as Turkish-Armenian relations and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are unlikely to progress in pre-election periods. Campaigning for the May 2012 parliamentary elections in Armenia will begin shortly and will be followed by campaigning for the February 2013 presidential elections. Growing sentiments will also induce both government and opposition to compete for a more “patriotic” image while moving towards 2015 – the 100th anniversary of the genocide. Therefore, even the small opportunity to normalize Turkish-Armenian relations and advance the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict may be lost, and that would benefit neither Turkey, nor Armenia, nor Azerbaijan.

RUSSIAN SECURITY FORCES KILL HEAD OF THE DAGESTANI INSURGENCY

Olof Staaf

Russian Security Forces have reported that Israpil Validzhanov, who is also known as Emir Khasan, was killed on the night of April 18. Validzhanov was appointed head of Dagestan’s Shariat Jamaat after his predecessor Magomedali Vagabov was killed in August 2010.

According to the head of the republic’s Department of Investigation, Validzhanov and three other men were stopped by officers from the Federal Security Service and the Dagestani Interior Ministry at a checkpoint outside the village of Tashkapur in central Dagestan. When the men were asked to identify themselves they reportedly opened fire from inside the two cars they were travelling in. The officers at the checkpoint responded by firing back and all four militants were killed in the encounter. Soon thereafter, the report of

Validzhanov’s death was supported by Russia’s National Anti-Terrorism Committee and the bodies of the four dead men were exhibited to the media. The Russian claims were later confirmed by sources loyal to the insurgency.

The National Anti-Terrorism Committee has also stated that one of the other militants killed at the checkpoint has been identified as a cousin of the female suicide bomber Mariam Sharipova. According to Russian news sources, Sharipova was married to the former insurgency leader Magomedali Vagabov and she is said to have been one of the perpetrators in last year’s Moscow Metro bombings.

Israpil Validzhanov was born in 1968. He was an ethnic Dargin and a native of the village of Sanchi,

near Derbent in the Southeastern part of Dagestan. Validzhanov is said to have been among those radical Dagestani Salafists who moved to Chechnya in the end of the 1990s. In Chechnya, he underwent military training and became a member of Saudi jihadist Emir al-Khattab's so called International Islamic Brigade. According to the National Anti-Terrorism Committee, Validzhanov also participated in the Brigade's invasion of Dagestan in the summer of 1999. Even though the invading force, which was led by al-Khattab and the notorious Chechen commander Shamil Basayev, did not manage to win the support of the civilian population in Dagestan, the episode helped to spark the second war in Chechnya.

After returning to Dagestan, Validzhanov played an increasingly influential part in the republic's emerging rebel movement. He has been on Russia's federal wanted list since 2006 and before becoming the head of the Shariat Jamaat, he was the leader of the southern sector of the insurgency movement.

Validzhanov is the seventh leader of the Dagestani rebel movement to be killed since the Dagestani Jamaat emerged as a militant insurgency structure about a decade ago. The last six leaders of the insurgency have all been killed within a period of less than four years. Furthermore, on January 27, Adam Huseynov, who was considered to be Validzhanov's second in command at the time, was killed in a counterinsurgency operation outside the city of Khasavyurt. And on April 25, Gadzhiyav Gaziyeu, leader of the highland sector of the

insurgency, was reported to have been killed in the Tsumandinskiy province.

Although the death of Validzhanov and other high ranking militants is a considerable setback for the Shariat Jamaat, it is unlikely to have any significant effect on the overall security situation in the republic. The impact that the killings of leading figures have on the insurgency movement in Dagestan is reduced by both the decentralized structure of the armed resistance and the strengthened position of the ideology of the insurgency. Local Jamaats have the ability to continue their activities independently from the central leadership and experts have described Dagestan as a republic where the resistance movement has become embedded in society. The Salafi beliefs are slowly becoming a more accepted part of Dagestani society and the number of Salafi practitioners appear to be increasing.

Even though the Security Forces have been successful in finding and killing the leaders of the Dagestani Jamaat, the level of violence in the republic has not been decreasing during the last years. On the contrary, available statistics indicate that there has been a steady increase in the number of reported violent incidents since the beginning of 2010. This has led experts to view the high number of leading militants killed in Dagestan not only as a testament to the effectiveness of the Russian Intelligence Services but also as an indicator of the active character of the Dagestani insurgency.

AZERBAIJAN PROTESTS PLANNED AIRPORT IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Mina Muradova

The three Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia held a meeting in Moscow on April 22 to discuss several issues related to the resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. An issue of

special concern is the increased tension along the frontline due to intensifying cease-fire violations over recent months.

Observers said that tensions peaked when Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan announced his

intention to be the first passenger on the first flight from Yerevan to a reopened airport in Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, the Armenian side announced that the opening ceremony will be held on May 9, which is a black date for Azerbaijanis as it is connected with the occupation of the town of Shusha in Nagorno-Karabakh, considered a cradle of Azerbaijani culture. Thus, official Baku has threatened to shoot down any flight over Nagorno-Karabakh, legally part of Azerbaijan's territory.

During a recent visit to the region, international mediators expressed their concern over the planned opening of an airport in the breakaway region, saying it could fuel further tensions. The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, Ambassadors Bernard Fassier of France, Robert Bradtke of the U.S., and Igor Popov of the Russian Federation, traveled to Yerevan, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Baku on April 11-14, where they met separately with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the de facto authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Located ten kilometers from the region's main city – called Khankendi by Azerbaijanis and Stepanakert by Armenians – the airport was closed down during the most intense fighting in 1991-1992. The reconstruction of the airport has taken over a year and has sustained costs of US\$ 2.8 million to unspecified "charitable sources", according to Armenian media reports. The de facto leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh announced the opening of a "civilian" airport in May for the first time in twenty years. It was stated that the airline company Air Artsakh (Artsakh is Armenian name for Karabakh), established by the region's unrecognized authorities, will first launch flights between Khankendi/Stepanakert and Yerevan four times a week. Three SRJ-200 planes have been purchased for US\$ 15-16 million to provide 40-minute flights for 50 passengers each.

According to the Armenian side, one building at the Stepanakert airport has already been constructed and is currently being equipped with navigation and other systems, while asphaltting is about to start.

In March, Azerbaijan's aviation authorities warned that flights from and to Karabakh's new airport are not authorized and that the country has the right to shoot down any plane that violates its airspace, causing international concern. Some regional players, like the U.S., Russia, Turkey, and international organizations have sought to calm Azerbaijani authorities. The U.S. and the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group attest that Azerbaijan does not intend to shoot down civilian aircrafts, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Philip Gordon said to journalists on April 21 in Baku after his meeting with Azerbaijan's Minister of Foreign Affairs. "The U.S. previously voiced its clear position on this matter. Threats to destroy civilian aircraft are unacceptable", Gordon reportedly said. Elkhan Polukhov, a spokesman of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, also reiterated that Azerbaijan would not use force against civilian objects. However, official Baku now underline that they will rely on all possible diplomatic means to prevent the operation of the airport.

Azerbaijan's aviation administration has already made complaints about the planned flights to the United Nations-run International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which assigns airports the identification codes required for flight plans. The ICAO stated that only the aviation regulatory body of the member state in which an airport is located can issue an identifier code. Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan. At the same time, in an interview to Mediamax news agency, the ICAO representative underlined that issues related to the opening of an airport in Karabakh and launching of flights have to be settled in bilateral negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Diplomatic measures taken by Baku have already started to bear fruit. On April 14, the co-chairs stated that the operation of flights to and from this airport "could not be used to support any claim of a change in the current status of Nagorno-Karabakh under international law". The co-chairs urged the sides to reach an understanding in adhering to international conventions and agreements, as well

as current practice between Armenia and Azerbaijan for flights over their territories. The co-chairs welcomed assurances from the sides that they will reject any threat or attack against civilian aircraft, pursue the matter through diplomatic means, and refrain from politicizing the issue. According to Trend news agency, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) also approved a document signed by over 20 PACE members representing different countries, demanding that the airport's construction be stopped since it can increase tensions in the region.

During their latest meetings in the region, the co-chairs discussed the next steps for reaching an agreement on the Basic Principles. "It is the strong view of the co-chairs that the time has arrived to finalize and endorse the Basic Principles and move to the drafting of a peace agreement," the statement said. The document also mentioned that the co-

chairs crossed the Line of Contact (LOC) by foot on April 13 before continuing to Baku. Like their crossing of the LOC in September 2010, this was intended to "demonstrate the importance of maintaining and strengthening the 1994 ceasefire and that the LOC should not become a permanent barrier to contacts among neighboring peoples". The mediators also visited the village of Orta Karvend southwest of the city of Terter, where a 10-year-old boy was shot on March 8.

In order to create "a transparent and objective" investigation process concerning casualties along the frontline, the mediators presented a draft mechanism for investigating incidents with the participation of all sides. The co-chairs will travel to Washington in late April for consultations with senior U.S. government officials, and to discuss the current status of progress towards a peace settlement.

KAZAKHSTAN AND INDIA STRENGTHEN BILATERAL TIES

Georgiy Voloshin

On April 15-16, 2011, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid his first official visit to Kazakhstan, after attending a meeting of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) on the Chinese island of Hainan. A series of bilateral agreements signed in the wake of his meeting with President Nazarbayev testify to India's firm commitment to strengthening and expanding its presence in the most developed country of Central Asia. Previously, a lack of adequate air communication, the remoteness of both capitals and scarcity of financial inflows from India impeded relevant cooperation to the advantage of other regional players, primarily Russia and China.

The most important achievement for the Indian side was the signing of an agreement on the transfer of a 25 percent share in the offshore Satpayev block on the Caspian Sea to the state-run ONGC Videsh Ltd. Kazakhstan's Government secured not only an

80 million dollar benefit paid by its Indian counterpart but also a promise of up to US\$ 400 million worth of investments that the Indians plan to contribute to the first stage of exploration works. It is believed that the Satpayev block may contain over 250 million tons of oil reserves and will ensure daily oil supplies of 287,000 barrels at the peak of its operations. Earlier in 2009, Indian media reported that the ONGC was close to clinching a deal with Kazakhstan's national oil and gas company, KazMunaiGaz, about the purchase of 30-40 percent in the Satpayev block, but such expectations did not materialize, possibly owing to heavy behind-the-scenes bargaining.

The heads of relevant agencies also signed an intergovernmental framework agreement on civil nuclear cooperation, which complements an earlier accord concluded during President Nazarbayev's four-day visit to India in January 2009. Ever since

the Nuclear Suppliers' Group lifted a moratorium on India's collaboration with third countries in civil nuclear activities in 2008, the Indian Government has concluded a series of agreements with a number of countries, including the U.S., Russia, France, Argentina, Canada and Mongolia. President Nazarbayev promised that Kazakhstan would be able to supply over 2,000 tons of uranium to India by 2014, as New Delhi foresees a fivefold increase in the production of nuclear energy for its rapidly developing industries and growing cities. A memorandum of understanding was already signed in 2009 between KazAtomProm, Kazakhstan's state owned company overseeing the production and commercialization of uranium, and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd, but this new agreement lays the basis for large scale cooperation on government contracts.

While commenting on Kazakhstan's outstanding role in Central Asia as the most developed economy and an active advocate of peaceful coexistence among neighbors, Prime Minister Singh expressed his desire to gradually introduce India to regional integration structures, namely by establishing close contacts with the Customs Union and reinforcing its role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. President Nazarbayev expressed his country's deep sympathy for India's aspirations to become a new permanent member of the UN Security Council, to which Singh responded with promises of support for Kazakhstan's rotating membership in the UN Security Council in 2017-2018.

A tangible success for Kazakh diplomacy came with the signing of a strategic partnership agreement providing for India's active participation in the implementation of various development programs on the territory of Kazakhstan. Both leaders

mentioned the areas of energy, high technology, agriculture and pharmaceuticals as priority fields for the next few years. President Nazarbayev announced that the Intergovernmental Commission will soon fix the dates for the Year of India in Kazakhstan and a similar year-round cycle of cultural and educational activities aimed at promoting Kazakhstan in India. Parliamentary cooperation and technical programs for young professionals are now also on the agenda.

Nazarbayev underscored the fact that bilateral trade between Astana and New Delhi, which reached US\$ 370 million last year, is not reflecting the significant economic potential of the two countries. One of the measures to improve the current situation would be to include Indian companies into the list of foreign partners participating in the Industrial and Innovation Program of Kazakhstan, in force until 2020. By boosting industrial development and pursuing diversification, Kazakhstan hopes to secure a steady 7 percent GDP growth by 2016, which will enable the domestic economy, under the most favorable circumstances, to show a US\$ 15,000 GDP per capita index in five years' time.

At the end of his meeting with the Kazakh President, Prime Minister Singh suggested that a joint Information Technology Center of Excellence be set up at the Eurasian National University in Astana, as part of India's plans to share state of the art knowledge and expertise in high tech and information fields. Joint ventures between Kazakhstani and Indian companies were also discussed.

NEWS DIGEST

NEW DELHI, ASTANA SIGN OIL DEAL

18 April

An Indian oil company said it signed an agreement to acquire stakes in a field in Kazakhstan that could hold more than 1 billion barrels of oil. ONGC Videsh, the foreign division of Indian energy explorer Oil and Natural Gas Corp. Ltd., announced it signed a "definitive" agreement with its Kazakh counterpart KazMunaiGas to take on a minority stake in the Satpayev exploration block in Kazakhstan, the Economic Times of India reports. The block holds an estimated 1.85 billion barrels worth of oil reserves. The agreement for the stake in the oil field came on the sidelines of a bilateral nuclear energy deal. The deal involves sharing technology and allows for India to purchase more than 2,000 tons of uranium from Kazakhstan. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said it was possible to expand on the agreement signed Saturday in Astana. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described the agreements as "solid and substantive." (UPI)

MOSCOW SAYS ISLAMIST LEADER KILLED IN DAGESTAN

18 April

Russian security forces on Monday killed an Islamist militant leader who masterminded attacks in the North Caucasus and threatened Moscow, federal authorities said. A decade after federal forces drove a separatist government from power in Chechnya, Moscow is fighting Islamist insurgents seeking to create an independent state in Russia's mostly Muslim North Caucasus. Russian news agencies quoted the National Anti-terror Committee (NAK) as saying security forces shot dead Israpil Validzhanov and three companions early on Monday in Dagestan, the violence-plagued province east of Chechnya. It said the militants had opened fire on members of the security forces who tried to stop their car. Validzhanov was the top representative in Dagestan of North Caucasus insurgency leader Doku Umarov, who claimed responsibility for a bomb attack on Moscow's

busiest airport in January, in which 37 people were killed. "Special forces together with law enforcement officers neutralized four active members of the bandit underground, among them the leader of Dagestan's bandits, Israpil Validzhanov," the state-run RIA agency quoted NAK as saying. Known among insurgents as Amir Khasan, Validzhanov received training in a separatist militant camp in 1998 in Chechnya, where he fought federal forces which entered the region the following year in the second of two wars since 1994, NAK said. It said Validzhanov was also responsible for dozens of attacks since the war died down a decade ago. Dagestan, a multi-ethnic republic between Chechnya and the Caspian Sea, is now considered the heart of the insurgency. (Reuters)

UZBEK SUBWAY STATIONS GET METAL DETECTORS IN WAKE OF MINSK BLAST

19 April

Security has been tightened on public transport in Tashkent following last week's deadly bombing of a subway station in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. Some subway stations have already been equipped with metal detectors while others are guarded by security officers with bomb-sniffing dogs. A recorded announcement on the subway urges people to report any unattended bags. A bus driver in Tashkent told RFE/RL on April 18 that security officials ordered transport drivers to report any suspicious behavior and gave them a special number to call. Larisa Yuryeva of the Tashkent subway's press office declined on April 18 to comment on the security precautions, saying she is not allowed to disclose such information. Uzbek authorities tightened the already stringent security measures at Tashkent's international airport following the blast at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport in January. Prior to that attack, nonpassengers were not allowed to enter the Tashkent airport terminal. Now they are not allowed even to approach the parking area. There were a few alleged terrorist attacks in Tashkent

between 1999-2004, mainly targeting law enforcement agencies and, in one case, the U.S. and Israeli embassies. Tashkent-based analyst Suhrob Ismailov says it is difficult to assess how great a threat terrorism poses in Uzbekistan due to the one-sided information provided by state security services. Commercials broadcast recently on state television depict the Uzbek police as guardians of national security and whom nobody should deny the right to search their bags. (RFE/RL)

AZERI PRIME MINISTER URGES WORLD COMMUNITY TO PROMOTE CLOSING ARMENIA'S METSAMOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

19 April

Prime minister of Azerbaijan Arthur Rasizadeh today has arrived in Ukraine to take part in the Summit on safe and innovative use of nuclear energy, which takes place in Kyiv in remembrance of the 25th anniversary of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Addressing the Summit, Azeri premier expressed his deep condolences to the families of liquidators who helped in the cleanup of the Chernobyl disaster. Prime minister emphasized that 8,000 Azerbaijanis were involved in the removal of the consequences of the April 26, 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe. Also Arthur Rasizadeh underlined the importance to draw closest attention to dangerously outdated Metsamor nuclear power plant, which is located in major earthquake zone in Armenia and poses a threat to the whole region. The Azeri premier urged world community to promote closing down Armenia's Metsamor nuclear power plant.

The Kyiv Summit has brought together a number of leaders and representatives of countries and international organizations. With a focus on the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster and the current developments in Japan, at Fukushima NPP, the summit aims at promoting the implementation of the commitments of the Nuclear Safety Summit in Washington in preparation for the upcoming nuclear safety summit in the Republic of Korea in 2012 and at analyzing activities under the UN Chernobyl Recovery and Development Program for 2006-2016. (AzerTAc)

GEORGIA ANNULS MILITARY TRANSIT TREATY WITH RUSSIA

19 April

Georgian Parliament unanimously endorsed on April 19 government's proposal to annul a five-year

agreement with Russia setting out procedures for transit of Russian military personnel and cargo to Armenia via Georgia.

The agreement on transit of military personnel and cargo, giving Russia access to its 102nd military base in Gyumri, Armenia through land and air via Georgia, was signed in March, 2006 in parallel with a separate agreement based on which Russia pulled out its military bases from Batumi and Akhalkalaki. The both of the agreements were ratified by the Georgian Parliament on April 13, 2006. "After Russia's aggression against Georgia, naturally, it was deemed appropriate by the competent agencies to annul the agreement following expiration of its five-year term," Nino Kalandadze, the Georgian deputy foreign minister, told lawmakers on April 19. She said that last time when Georgia issued permission to Russia's request for military transit based on the agreement was in July, 2008. After the August, 2008 war Georgia received one such request from Russia, but Tbilisi turned it down, Kalandadze said.

"Since then the Russian Federation has not applied for transit permission," she added. "I think annulment of this agreement does not really require additional explanations, because this agreement is in contravention of our national interests," said Irakli Kavtaradze, a lawmaker from the ruling party, who is a deputy chairman of the parliamentary committee for foreign affairs. A day before the parliamentary vote on the issue, Georgian Defense Minister, Bacho Akhalaia, paid his first official visit to Armenia on April 18. In Yerevan he met with his Armenian counterpart Seyran Ohanyan and President Serzh Sargsyan. Speaking at a joint news conference with his Armenian counterpart, the Georgian Defense Minister said that relations between the two countries were of special importance and there was nothing that could derail those close ties. According to the Georgian Defense Ministry the main topics of discussions during the visit were exchange of experience in defense sphere and cooperation in military education. According to MoD, the Georgian side offered Armenian counterparts to train their soldiers at the Georgian army mountain training site in Sachkhere. (Civil Georgia)

POTI, TRIESTE PLAN TO OPEN SEA TRANSPORT

21 April

A sea transport is planned to be opened between Georgia's Poti and the Italian city of Trieste to

transport commercial cargo, Georgian Prime Minister Nika Gilauri said commenting on his Italy visit. "We discussed the possibility of opening a sea transport. It is possible that European cargo will be conveyed to Asia through Poti. This is a very interesting project, as its implementation will attract additional cargo to the country, will bring more profits to us and create new jobs," Gilauri said. Gilauri was in Italy on a two-day visit. Also the opening of direct flights between Tbilisi and Rome was discussed during the meeting. "At a meeting with the Italian Economy Minister a number of new issues were discussed, including the establishment of direct flights between Tbilisi and Rome, in which the Italians are interested. I hope this issue will soon be resolved," Gilauri said. He said that if an agreement will be reached flights between Rome and Tbilisi will be carried out at least two or three times a week. (Trend)

CHINESE BANKS LOAN UZBEKISTAN \$1.5 BLN

21 April

Uzbekistan's state news agency says that leading Chinese banks have agreed to loan \$1.5 billion to banks in the Central Asian nation to finance joint investment projects. UzA reported Thursday that the deal came during an official visit to China by Uzbek President Islam Karimov. The agency says more than 25 investment agreements, worth a total of \$5 billion, were signed during the visit. The agreements covered investments in the chemical, energy and transportation sectors. Uzbekistan is reaching out to international investors to help update its aging industrial infrastructure, while China has spent heavily in Central Asia to ensure a steady flow of energy supplies. (AP)

NATO CLAIMS CAPTURE OF AN IMU LEADER IN AFGHANISTAN

22 April

NATO says its forces captured a leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Afghanistan's northern Konduz Province. NATO said in a statement that the IMU leader was captured along with two associates in the Khanabad district during a military operation on April 20. The statement did not give the IMU leader's name but did say he had escaped from an Afghan jail in 2010. The IMU fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 but U.S. strikes crippled the group, which then fled to Pakistan's tribal areas. The Al-Qaeda-linked group has recently reemerged

and elements of IMU forces have been active in Konduz Province, which borders Tajikistan. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN TO CHAIR TURKPA

25 April

Kazakhstan will chair the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-speaking countries (TurkPA), Kazakhstan Today reports. The Peace and Harmony Palace in Astana is to host events for the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic-speaking countries (TurkPA) on April 27-28, the Kazakh parliament's lower chamber said, Trend reported. "The TurkPA member-states' parliamentary speakers are expected to arrive in Kazakhstan to participate in the inter-parliamentary activities," the report states. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev initiated the creation of TurkPA at the Eight Summit of the Heads of Turkic-speaking countries in Antalya in November 2006. "The TurkPA Council will hold a meeting on April 7 at which the presidency of the organization will be transferred from Azerbaijan to Kazakhstan," the report reads. The TurkPA Council is expected to discuss the meeting's agenda and the draft agenda of the TurkPA second plenary session. Chairman of the Council TurkPA and Kazakh Parliamentary Speaker Ural Mokhamedjanov will speak on this. "The Turkic Academy's activity will be presented on April 28. The TurkPA second plenary session will start work at 10 am," the report reads. Kazakh Parliamentary Speaker Ural Mokhamedjanov, Azerbaijani Ogtay Asadov, Kyrgyz Ahmatbek Keldibekov and Turkish Mehmet Ali Shahin are all expected to make speeches at the session. TurkPA was established in Baku in 2009. The secretariat of the organization is also in Baku. The Secretariat consists of the Secretary General, his deputies from Turkey and Kazakhstan and the expert group. TurkPA includes Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. (Kazakhstan Today)

SCORES OF TALIBAN ESCAPE IN BRAZEN KANDAHAR JAILBREAK

25 April

Insurgents tunneled into the main jail in Afghanistan's volatile Kandahar Province early today, freeing hundreds of prisoners, including, it's believed, many Taliban commanders and foot soldiers. The incident is considered a serious setback for international forces who claim to have made significant progress against the insurgency in its southern strongholds around Kandahar.

Questions are also being raised about Afghan capability as Western troops begin a planned drawdown in coming months, handing security responsibilities over to the Afghans. Tooryalai Wesa, the governor of Kandahar Province, said the prisoners managed to escape due to the "negligence" of Afghan security forces. He said the start of the tunnel has been traced to a house near the Sarposa prison. Waheed Omar, a spokesman for President Hamid Karzai, said the prison break was "a blow" that he said showed "a great vulnerability in the Afghan government." Hundreds of Taliban escaped from the same prison in 2008 when the Taliban broke into the prison by blowing up its gates with a truck bomb. Speaking to RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan, Gulam Dastageer Mayar, the director of prisons in Kandahar, says police are investigating the jailbreak. "Most of the 467 prisoners who escaped were political prisoners," he says. "They had dug into [the prison] from some village, but it's not entirely clear how they did it. The police are investigating. At least eight of the escaped prisoners were rearrested this morning." Sarposa prison, rebuilt after the 2008 jailbreak, is supposed to be one of Afghanistan's most secure. It sits on the outskirts of Kandahar city and holds both captured insurgents and criminal prisoners from across southern Afghanistan, where thousands of American troops have spearheaded the campaign against rural Taliban strongholds. The Taliban, in its own statement, said 541 prisoners escaped through an extensive tunnel that took months to construct and were later moved in vehicles to safer locations. The statement said that "mujahedin started digging a 320-meter tunnel to the prison from the south side, which was completed after a five-month period, bypassing enemy checkpoints and [the] Kandahar-Kabul main highway leading directly to the political prison." The Taliban said the tunnel was completed late on April 24, with hundreds of insurgents escaping over a 4 1/2-hour period. (RFE/RL)

ASHGABAT AGREEMENT SIGNED TO CREATE UZBEKISTAN -TURKMENISTAN - IRAN - OMAN - QATAR - TRANSPORT CORRIDOR

25 April

A signing ceremony of an international agreement on forming a new international transport and transit corridor Uzbekistan -Turkmenistan - Iran - Oman - Qatar has been held today in Ashgabat in the morning.

According to an official Turkmen source, the signing of the document was held at the level of these countries' foreign ministers. The legal document will enable the Central Asian countries to contact with the Persian and Oman gulfs' ports with an optimal route in the perspective. In addition, Russia and China can also get access to these markets that will make the project economically profitable. (Trend)

KARZAI'S OFFICE SAYS AFGHAN PRISON BREAK MOST LIKELY AN INSIDE JOB

26 April

Afghan President Hamid Karzai's office today acknowledged that a huge Afghan prison break in which hundreds of Taliban inmates escaped was most likely facilitated from the inside. The office statement from the palace said the mass escape through a tunnel "is an indicator of cooperation and facilitation from inside the prison." Some 488 prisoners, the vast majority of whom are thought to be Taliban, escaped from Kandahar prison in southern Afghanistan through a 1-kilometer tunnel overnight on April 24. The Taliban said the tunnel took five months to dig. Karzai's spokesman Waheed Omer previously described the escape as a "disaster." Local officials said today that they have recaptured 65 prisoners. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN OPEN TO DISCUSS TURNING BAIKONUR SPACE CENTER INTO JSC

26 April

Kazakhstan is ready to consider Russia's proposal of converting the Baikonur Space Center into a joint-stock company with Russia as a major shareholder, Kazakh chief Talgat Musabayev said on Tuesday. Baikonur, the world's first and largest space center which Russia currently uses for many of its space launches, is located in Kazakhstan and leased by Russia until 2050. Russia plans to cut the share of its space flights from Baikonur to only 11 percent as soon as its Vostochny space launch facility starts operation in 2015. "We will work on the issue together with Russia and other states. It is worth thinking about," said Musabayev, the head of Kazakhstan's space agency Kazcosmos. The Vostochny launch facility in Russia will initially be used for launching cargo spacecraft and satellites. Manned spacecraft will be launched from the space center starting in 2018. Last week, the head of the Russian space agency, Roscosmos, Anatoly Perminov, suggested turning the space center into a

joint-stock company with Russia getting 70 percent of the shares as soon as Vostochny goes into operation. (RIA Novosti)

TURKMENISTAN SCRAPS MANDATORY SCHOOL-LEAVING EXAM ON LATE PRESIDENT'S HOLY BOOK

26 April

The rambling spiritual guide penned by Turkmenistan's late president was for years hailed as the source of universal knowledge. Now, it's playing second fiddle to computer science. Students will instead have to take a computer science test in the latest sign that the overbearing personality cult to Niyazov, who ruled Turkmenistan for two decades until his death in 2006, is gradually being dismantled. Turkmenistan has some of the largest reserves of natural gas in the world and has been actively courted by Western nations, China and Russia. In spite of that international attention, Turkmenistan has largely cut itself off from the world since gaining independence in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even as the country's energy wealth has generated vast revenues, critics contend many people remain mired in poverty and that unemployment is high. Reliable official information is hard to come by in this deeply secretive nation. Turkmenistan's educational standards withered under the arbitrary and authoritarian rule of Niyazov. He issued a decree in 2004 invalidating all university degrees obtained abroad and made study of the Rukhnama obligatory for students at all levels. First issued in 2001, Rukhnama was quickly made the cornerstone of a pervasive state-sponsored ideology based on Niyazov's world view and was described in official publications as "the source of universal knowledge." Critics, meanwhile, have described it as an incoherent anthology of insipid literature and folksy, often hopelessly inaccurate, accounts of the nation's history. "One passage says the Turkmens were the first to harvest (wheat for) bread, even though there was no such thing as the Turkmen people when that happened," said Farid Tukhbatullin, who heads the Vienna-based Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights. Tukhbatullin said the erratic nature of the book often forced students to simply learn its contents by heart, at the expense of studying more useful subjects. "There was simply no logic. At one point there is a bit about how (Niyazov's) father died in the war in Germany and then suddenly it drifts off into an account of ancient myths," he said.

Although, the book is still taught for an hour a week in all classrooms, its role in Turkmen society has noticeably waned since Niyazov's successor, Gurbanguli Berdymukhamedov, came to power. The annual Rukhnama Day in September was once celebrated with great fanfare, but is now only nominally observed. It is not yet clear if Rukhnama exams might also be scrapped for those seeking to gain a university place. Berdymukhamedov has gradually implemented educational reforms in a bid to mitigate Niyazov's excesses. His government has increased basic education to 10 years from nine, and higher education has been extended from two years to five. Last month, Berdymukhamedov ordered the government to start recognizing foreign educational qualifications, a change that will allow graduates of international universities to get state jobs. Tukhbatullin said much still needs to be done to overhaul the devastated education system and root out the legacy of the Rukhnama. "School textbooks need to be totally rewritten, maybe with the help of international experts, but at least this is better than nothing," he said. (AP)

PRESIDENT OF TURKMENISTAN EXPECTED TO VISIT TASHKENT

26 April

The upcoming visit of President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov to Uzbekistan scheduled for this May will "open the new page in the history of interstate dialogue", newspaper Neutral Turkmenistan reported on Tuesday. The newspaper quoted Uzbek Foreign Minister Eler Ganiyev as reporting this at a meeting with the head of Turkmenistan. "They in Uzbekistan wait with great encouragement for the upcoming visit of President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, which undoubtedly will open the new page in the history of interstate dialogue", the Minister said. The high-ranking Uzbek official passed over the greetings of President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov to the head of Turkmenistan. "They in Uzbekistan attach great importance to the relations of friendship and fruitful cooperation with the fraternal Turkmenistan", Ganiyev said. The Uzbek Foreign Minister had arrived in Ashgabad to attend the signing ceremony of the Agreement on international transport & transit corridor Turkmenistan-Iran-Sultanate Oman-Qatar-Uzbekistan which will "allow intensifying mutually beneficial trade and economic contacts in the Eurasian area". The two states are linked by a

number of large projects; particularly, a gas pipeline leading from Turkmenistan to China via the territories of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan became operational in December 2009. The joint Turkmen-Uzbek commission for trade, economic, scientific-technical and cultural cooperation holds its meetings regularly. Following the results of one of these meetings, the sides signed a protocol which stressed permanent growth of trade turnover between the two countries. It was decided to expand the list of goods and increase mutual supplies of goods, and establish new joint ventures.

The neighboring Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan last year increased bilateral trade turnover by more than 50 percent to about \$270 million. An example of successful cooperation is the joint venture Turkmen-Uzauto specialized in sale and servicing of cars in Turkmenistan. (Trend)

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT RECEIVES SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF IRANIAN PRESIDENT FOR CASPIAN AFFAIRS

26 April

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has today received special representative of the Iranian President for Caspian affairs Mohammad Mehdi Akhundzadeh, the Azerbaijani President's official website reported. They discussed bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Iran and the current state of the ongoing talks to prepare legal status of the Caspian Sea. The parties underlined the importance of the summit of Heads of State of Caspian countries held in Baku. (Trend)

GEORGIAN FM ON WTO TALKS WITH RUSSIA

26 April

There is absolutely no pressure on Georgia from the western partners to soften position in talks over Russia's WTO accession, Grigol Vashadze, the Georgian foreign minister said in an interview with the Russian magazine published on April 25. "Our partners told us only once, that while negotiating with the Russian delegation, please, remember, that the entire world's economy will benefit from

Russia's WTO accession," Vashadze told Russian weekly magazine, Ogoniok, which is part of the Kommersant Publishing Group. Next round of Georgia-Russia talks on Moscow's WTO entry terms will be held in the Swiss capital, Bern, on April 28-29. "We go to Bern for negotiations not with a purpose to block Russia's WTO accession; we go there in order to find together with the Russian delegation mutually acceptable way out of the legal nightmare, which Moscow has created with its unthoughtful, hasty, emotional and stupid decision to recognize so called independence of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region," he said. Vashadze said, that Tbilisi was pushing for trade-related demands regulated by the WTO rules.

"We won't be putting on the table of negotiations any political, military or other issues not related to the matter," Vashadze said. (Civil Georgia)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION PARTY IN TALKS ON JOINING COALITION

27 April

Kyrgyzstan's opposition Ar-Namys (Dignity) party is negotiating terms for joining the ruling coalition with the leaders of the three ruling parties, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reports. Tursunbai Bakir-uulu, a member of the Ar-Namys parliament faction, told RFE/RL that party leader Feliks Kulov was holding talks with Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev about joining the coalition. A major condition Kulov put forward for joining is that Atambaev agree to name Kulov prime minister if he steps down from that post to take part in the presidential election scheduled for the fall. Many analysts expect Atambaev to run for president. On April 15, 10 of the 25 members of the Ar-Namys parliamentary faction announced they would join the coalition in parliament. The Ar-Namys party condemned the decision as "illegal and senseless." Respublika, the Social Democratic Party, and Ata-Jurt (Homeland) are the parties in the ruling coalition while Ar-Namys and Ata-Meken (Fatherland) are the two opposition parties represented in parliament. (RFE/RL)