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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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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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NEW IRAN SANCTIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE BLACK SEA-CASPIAN REGION

Mamuka Tsereteli

The U.S. Congress is considering new draft legislation that will significantly tighten the existing sanctions regime against the Islamic Republic of Iran. This legislation could, if adopted in its current language, have unintended and negative consequences for U.S. strategic interests, as well as energy security, in the Black Sea-Caspian region. The potential sanctions contradict the existing U.S. policy of developing multiple export pipelines, a policy promoted and implemented by several U.S. administrations in the 20 years since collapse of the Soviet Union. The new legislation may contribute to the redirection of Azerbaijani energy exports to the north, towards Russia, and to the east, towards China, and may help strengthen Gazprom's position in the Caucasus.

BACKGROUND: In May 2011, the U.S. Congress introduced draft legislation designed to tighten the loopholes in the existing Iran sanctions regime and, for the first time, extend U.S. sanctions to joint ventures involved in the development of petroleum resources outside Iran. The House legislation (draft legislation HR 1905) amends the definition of investment in Section 113(11) of the existing Iran Sanctions Act to include a new subsection (D) which includes "The provision of goods, services or technology related to petroleum resources." The definition does not limit the investment to projects in Iran, thus extending the applicability to projects outside Iran. The Senate version (draft legislation S 1048) extends sanctions to all joint ventures with respect to the development of petroleum resources outside Iran in which Iran is a substantial partner. The new legislation also aims to prevent the purchase of Iranian crude oil.

The draft legislation links the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to all Iran-related energy activity both inside and outside Iran. In other words, any country or company doing energy-related business with Iran is also doing business with the IRGC, therefore

facilitating the development of Iran's nuclear capability.

This legislation presents particular political risks to the Shah-Deniz consortium in Azerbaijan, as well as to the investors, service companies and contractors for the project. The Iranian National Oil Company owns 10 percent of the Shah Deniz Consortium. Other shareholders include BP (25.5 percent), Norwegian Statoil (25.5 percent), Azerbaijani SOCAR (10 percent), Russian Lukoil (10 percent), French Total (10 percent), and Turkish TPAO (9 percent). The current production of the field is about 8 bcm of natural gas, which is exported by the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline (BTE), or by the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) to Georgia (2 bcm) and Turkey (close to 6 bcm). This pipeline and natural gas from the Shah-Deniz field has provided Georgia with a much needed alternative to Russian natural gas supplies and has helped Turkey diversify its supplies.

The second phase of development at the Shah-Deniz field will produce an additional 16 bcm to supply Turkey, as well as several potential consumers in the European Union, thus facilitating Europe's energy security and

diversification of energy supply. As of today, the Shah Deniz field is considered the only reliable source of natural gas for the potential Nabucco or ITGI pipelines.

IMPLICATIONS: By impacting the Shah Deniz Consortium, the draft legislation will have a significant impact on U.S. strategic interests in the Black Sea-Caspian region and will reverse many of the achievements of previous successful policies. Even if the U.S. legislation permits the development of Shah Deniz II, or if the project is legal and/or permissible under U.S. law, the Government of Azerbaijan and the Shah Deniz partners will experience intense scrutiny from Washington and political uncertainty over the course of the project, due to the connections this legislation establishes between them and the IRGC.

Over the last two decades, a combination of multiple factors has contributed to a large-scale development of energy infrastructure in the Caspian region. Geopolitical realities favored the westward orientation of oil and gas pipelines from the landlocked region. U.S. sanctions against Iran excluded Iran from the list of potential export routes for Caspian energy resources. The multiple obstacles created by the Russian state-owned energy monopolies, Transneft and Gazprom, prevented the easy transportation of energy resources to Western consumers, also making the Russian option unattractive. In addition, there was a clear desire of the U.S. and Europe to help the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union to build their own sovereign economies. As a result, the U.S. initiated a so-called Multiple Pipeline Strategy that envisioned the development of multiple new commercial pipelines crossing several countries, including Russia.

The close collaboration of the U.S., Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kazakhstan in the process of implementation of that strategy played a crucial role in building a strong economic structure between the Caspian and Black Seas and Mediterranean seaports. The construction of major oil and natural gas pipelines between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey solidified the region's dramatic break from Russian energy dominance and political leverage.

This new legislation could have a significant negative impact on those strategic achievements. If those involved in the Shah Deniz consortium are targeted by sanctions, the energy flow from Azerbaijan may be redirected to Russia and eventually towards Asian markets. This will have substantial implications for European energy security and Georgian security. The emerging trends in the Caspian energy and export infrastructure development must also be taken into consideration. In 2010, two new pipelines were commissioned by Azerbaijan's Caspian neighbor Turkmenistan; one pipeline going east to China (with a 30 bcm capacity), and the other going south to Iran (with a capacity of 20 bcm). Russia also managed to obtain a contract with Azerbaijan for the purchase of 2 bcm annually. These trends indicate new alternatives for the export of Azerbaijani resources, which will only be explored further if the new sanctions legislation is approved.

These developments need to be considered in the context of weakening strategic ties between the regional actors of the Black Sea-Caspian region which have for over a decade been constructed around the energy and transportation infrastructure. The current commitment to soft power on the part of both the EU and the U.S. cannot match the assertive



(Reuters/Raheb Homavandi)

political-military and energy policies of the Russian Federation in the region. The Shah Deniz project with its potential to supply European markets can boost relationships between the Caspian region and Europe, but events may take an opposite direction if the Consortium, its shareholders and contractors are targeted by sanctions.

CONCLUSIONS: Several factors have weakened the strategic position of the U.S. and the West in general in the Black Sea-Caspian region. These include the ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; the global economic crisis; an expanded Russian military presence in Georgia; increased economic ties between Russia and Turkey that translate into greater political interdependency; a more significant Chinese economic and political presence in the region; and the internal dynamics of relationships between major regional actors including disagreements

between Turkey and Azerbaijan over the Turkish-Armenian reconciliation process and natural gas pricing issues. This incomplete list of factors indicates the lack of a coherent strategy on part of the West for safeguarding vital interests in the region.

While intended to strengthen sanctions against Iran, the newly introduced

draft legislations HR 1905 and S 1048 will likely weaken the positions of important Western allies in the Black Sea-Caspian Region significantly, and will force Azerbaijan to focus on expanding its energy partnerships with Russia, China, and even Iran. This outcome would further damage the long-term strategic interests of the U.S. and Europe, and prove detrimental to both European energy security and Georgia's energy and economic independence. It is essential for the sponsors of the new legislation to reconsider the language of the drafts in order to protect the Shah-Deniz consortium from the negative impact of the extended sanctions against Iran.

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THE REUNIFICATION OF THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE

Aaron Y. Zelin

In late July 2011, the Caucasus Emirate's official media mouthpiece Kavkaz Center announced that the two rival factions within the emirate had reconciled their differences through a Shari'ah court. Aslambek Vadalov and Khusayn Gakayev, as well as other commanders who previously rescinded their bay'at to Doku Umarov, renewed their allegiance. This episode provides further evidence of the decline of Arab fighter influence in the Caucasus jihad, yet paradoxically shows the impact of popular Arab online jihadi shaykhs. It also solidifies Umarov's pan-Caucasus project as the leading resistance to Russian aggression in contrast to the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's claims as the true representatives of the more nationalist-Islamist Chechen struggle.

BACKGROUND: Umarov, the emir of the Caucasus Emirate, first proclaimed the emirate in 2007, but his leadership came into question in late July 2010. Umarov announced in a video that Aslambek Vadalov, the commander of the Eastern Front of the Armed Forces of the Caucasus Emirate, would succeed him immediately. Umarov said he strongly believed in the importance of clear lines of succession should he suddenly die. He urged his followers to pledge *bay'at* (a formal declaration of allegiance) to Vadalov. A week later, however, Umarov followed up his earlier message with a stunning announcement: he was recanting his resignation; the announcement of which he claimed had been “fabricated.”

In a separate message released online that same week, Vadalov announced that he was stepping down from the position of deputy Emir. This feud went back and forth online through October 2010, when Umarov and the new opposition leveled charges against one another, each attempting to shore up their positions. Umarov felt betrayed after conceding some of his failures in a high-level commanders meeting and offering to step down, but when the video that announced Vadalov as his successor

contained an added statement from Vadalov, alongside two other senior leaders: Khusayn Gakayev and an Arab, known as Mukhannad (Khalid Yusuf Muhanned al-Emirati), who was reportedly al-Qaeda's liaison in the North Caucasus and died in April 2011.

In early October, two videos that had been originally recorded in August surfaced, detailing a growing rift between those loyal to Umarov and a breakaway contingent that had joined with Vadalov. In the first video, Vadalov, Gakayev, and a commander named Tarkhan Gaziyeu rescinded their *bay'at* to Umarov. They said their main grievance was that Umarov had suspended the Majlis al-Shura, the Emirate's consultative council, and had formed the Caucasus Emirate without first consulting with other senior leaders. They declared that Gakayev was now the Emir of Chechnya and that they no longer recognized Umarov, asserting that the fighters in Chechnya supported their decision. In a second video, the three men reiterated their loyalty to Gakayev, this time alongside other commanders, suggesting that Gakayev's faction wanted to refocus the Caucasus Emirate on



(AFP)

Chechen nationalist concerns rather than Umarov's pan-Caucasus global jihadi vision.

Umarov responded not long after with a published decree eliminating the South-Western and Eastern Fronts, ordering all commanders to renew their *bay'at* to him, demanding Gakayev to hand over the money and supplies he'd been given, and giving Mukhannad one month to report to the emir's "court" over charges he had fomented *fitnah* (discord). Umarov also released a video denouncing all who rescinded their *bay'at*, saying they had lost their will for jihad. Complicating matters, online jihadi shaykhs Abu Basir al-Tartusi and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi issued *fatwas* stating that Umarov was the true emir.

IMPLICATIONS: It is believed that the death of Mukhannad paved the way for the two factions to come together and reconcile their issues. If this is indeed the case, although the Caucasus Emirate believes in the global jihadi pan-Islamic ideology, they may not have as strong links to al-Qaeda as some commentators believe. The death of Mukhannad provides further proof of the decline in not only Arab participation, but also influence amongst the fighters in the Caucasus. Indeed, part of the decline in Arabs joining the Caucasus jihad is due in part to the more popular destinations of jihad in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. This further confirms Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty's past research on the waning level of Arabs fighting in the Caucasus.

Although the level of influence from Arab fighters in the Caucasus has waned, the connection to the overall global jihadi community has become further cemented. When ruling on the schism, the leading shari'ah official in the Caucasus Emirate, Ali Abu Muhammed al-Dagestani, stated that the opposition faction's disobedience to Umarov was contrary to Islamic law. This echoes the *fatwa* released by al-Maqdisi, who is considered the most influential living jihadi theorist, in September 2010. Al-Maqdisi has had a keen interest through his *Minbar al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* (The Pulpit of Monotheism and Jihad) project in "purifying" the jihad from so-called negative influences and, as a result, has focused on providing advice to the Caucasus Emirate since he believes it provides a good example of how jihad should be waged "cleanly." Therefore, although the Caucasus Emirate's connections to al-Qaeda may be scant, al-Maqdisi's advice and blessings upon Umarov's leadership, and the way his movement conducts jihad, provides his group with legitimacy from a highly regarded religious scholar, placing the Caucasus Emirate as an important front in the global jihad against *tawaghit* (tyrants).

Further, the apparent reconciliation between the various factions would be a major blow to the Chechen Republic Ichkeria (ChRI), the predecessor to the Caucasus Emirate, which has focused more on Chechnya as a nationalist-Islamist oriented secessionist movement. Twice following the outbreak of the fissures within the Caucasus Emirate – first in October 2010 and most recently in June 2011 – Akhmad Zakayev, the leader of the ChRI in exile following Umarov's creation of the Caucasus Emirate, announced and later reaffirmed he was resigning as President, dismantling his cabinet

and supporting Gakayev as the new leader. The reconciliation between Gakayev's faction and the Caucasus Emirate, therefore, is not only a repudiation of Zakayev, but also eliminates any possibility that the conflict with Russia will once again be centered on Chechen nationalist and secessionist ideas versus Umarov's pan-Caucasus Islamic identity. Following the announced *détente* between the two Caucasus Emirate rivals, Zakayev's ChRI released a statement in July 2011 condemning them, arguing that they were fomenting *fitnah*, which strengthens Russian hands in their conflict.

CONCLUSIONS: The reconciliation between Umarov's Caucasus Emirate and Gakayev's faction ends a years-long dispute that pitted influential leaders that have played crucial roles in the insurgency against the Russians the past few years. This development sidelines Zakayev and his ChRI leadership in exile. It also further diminishes Arab fighter influence over the Caucasus Emirate, yet boosts the importance of Arab shaykhs from the outside. Most significant, though, is that the Caucasus Emirate can now refocus its conflict with Russia instead of internecine fighting, and expand its sphere of influence in other former Muslim lands that they perceive to be occupied, such as the Volga-Ural region, which the Caucasus Emirate has attempted to reach out to recently in its propaganda. The resolution between the two parties also points to the victory of the global jihadi vision over more nationalist-Islamist claims in the long-running and protracted war with Russia.

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IRAN PLAYS DIPLOMATIC HARDBALL AND ITS NEIGHBORS RETALIATE

Stephen Blank

While Iran has often sought to cultivate the governments of Central Asia and the Caucasus, occasionally it has made use of forceful diplomatic, if not military, instruments. During 2011 Tehran has again displayed its claws. Tajikistan has had to recall its students from Iranian religious schools, even though Tajikistan has long tired to cultivate Iran politically, economically, and diplomatically. Iran also reacted harshly to Turkey's growing criticism of its protégé in Damascus. Worst of all, a high-ranking Iranian general criticized Azerbaijan vocally for its ties to Israel and alleged anti-Islamic practices.

BACKGROUND: Ever since the Soviet collapse, governments in and out of the former Soviet Union have worried that Iran might try either to seduce or subvert the new regimes in Central Asia and the Caucasus or that it might try to undermine them using more forceful diplomatic, if not military, instruments. For the most part Iran has not overtly employed such tactics and has often tried to cultivate these regimes. But occasionally the mask has slipped, as in 2001, when Iran threatened force against Azerbaijani oil exploration in the Caspian Sea. Iran has also been the most obstructive of the Caspian littoral states in blocking resolution of the contemporary legal status of that sea by claiming a disproportionate amount of the coastline, clearly to maximize its access to Caspian energy deposits.

Governments in Central Asia and Azerbaijan have long been wary of Iran's potential to meddle in their affairs, and there have been numerous reports of Iranian-backed political groups, particularly but not only in Azerbaijan, working against the national governments. Tehran has also consistently supported the Armenian side in its conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Tajikistan's suspicions of Iranian efforts at political indoctrination of its students duly

accords with publicly voiced suspicions by Uzbek President Islam Karimov of Iran's activities and the overall Central Asian disinclination not to bring Iran into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or support in any way its nuclear program. Similarly, Turkey has now declared its loss of patience and support for Iran's client, Syria, and Turkey has long been concerned to head off both Iran's nuclear program and a potential Western attack against it. Although Iran has previously cooperated with Turkey against the Kurds, it apparently recently preempted a planned Turkish offensive against Kurdish groups based in Iraq to remove them from Turkey's way. Iran is therefore apparently trying to pressure Turkey into supporting Syria with the implied threat of turning to support the PKK and other Kurdish groups against Turkey if it does not comply with Iran's requests.

By far the most visible signs of Iranian hardball have to do with Azerbaijan. Iran has long suspected Baku of having links or intentions of playing on the grievances of Iran's Azerbaijani minority to foment a secessionist movement based on the idea of some form of united Azerbaijani state on both sides of the current border. These ethnic suspicions go back a long way. Similarly Azerbaijan has long known of

Iranian underground support for opponents of the regime going back a number of years. And when the Azerbaijani government launched a crackdown on its Islamic opposition, it claimed to have found evidence of Iranian political and military support for those groups. Indeed, Iran has long been vocally critical of the Aliyev government's campaign against the Islamic headscarf in schools, and its overall pro-Western cultural orientation despite being a Shiite majority nation. Furthermore, Iran has directed its ire against Baku for continuing to develop and expand friendly ties with Israel and cooperate with it and for its support for the United States.

Tehran has long suspected that the United States wants to use Azerbaijan as an air base and listening post from which to strike at or at least constantly monitor Iranian developments. Therefore on numerous occasions it has both publicly and privately threatened Azerbaijan that if it acceded to U.S. requests for a base or sizable military presence, it could destroy Azerbaijan.

In this vein, Major General Hassan Firuzabadi, head of Iran's General Staff, recently accused Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev of giving "command to bar Islamic rules", declared that the "people's awakening cannot be suppressed", and accused the Azerbaijani government of allowing the "Zionist regime" (Israel) to meddle in his country's affairs. These remarks (which naturally Tehran quickly denied) have intensified the bad blood between Iran and Azerbaijan.

General Firuzabadi's remarks along with the ongoing Iranian attacks on Azerbaijan's pro-American and pro-Israeli policies must be seen in this context. And there is little doubt that these Iranian pressure tactics, along with the threat of internal subversion, has influenced

Baku to refuse to place a U.S. base in its country. Meanwhile as domestic opposition to Aliyev's religious policies continues, it is clear that the Azerbaijani government regards Iran as quite threatening and General Firuzabadi's remarks as outrageous. Indeed, there is more than enough evidence to suggest that Iran is continuing to fan the flames of this opposition; Baku's claims that unrest there is in no small measure instigated from outside have merit.

IMPLICATIONS: It is clear that Iran's threats have to do with the civil war in Syria, but they also pertain to what it apparently believes is an opportunity to undermine the Azerbaijani regime that it regards as a threat and far too pro-Western. It is attempting as well to incite upheaval in Azerbaijan under the guise of the Arab spring, showing that in post-Soviet regimes, there is more to such a scenario, at least in Azerbaijan, than domestic discontent with misrule. But Iranian domestic politics may be a possible factor too. We have long known of the rivalry between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for supremacy, and these moves may possibly fit into this scenario; Iran has lately conducted tough moves also against Russia. No sooner did Moscow try to restore ties with Iran by proposing a new negotiation package to deal with the nuclear issue and send Security Council head, Nikolai Patrushev to Tehran for what appeared to be reasonably successful talks, than did Tehran turn around and sue Moscow to force it to repay it for the abortive S-300 air defense system that was cancelled.

Possibly this good cop-bad cop routine aims at pressuring Moscow, too, to support Syria more than it has done until now (although Bashar Assad has refused to listen to anything Moscow has advised him up to now). Or it might reflect one wing of the government fighting against



another, as might General Firuzabadi's remarks on Azerbaijan, which were clearly sanctioned from above. Given the high degree of impenetrability of this government and the obscurity of many of the rivals and even of who stands for what in these domestic quarrels, certainty remains elusive. But it is clear that the rocky relationship between Iran and its Central Asian and South Caucasian neighbors has again taken a step towards heightened tensions.

CONCLUSIONS: It is too early to tell how these tensions will resolve themselves, if at all. But they do illustrate the increasing integration of Central Asian and Caucasian issues into a broader international agenda having to do with Iran's geopolitical ambitions in the Middle East and the impact of the Arab spring. Thus these events underscore the growing impact of globalization on Eurasian countries' foreign policies and their needs to reckon with trends in the Middle East.

No matter how the current episodes of Iran's challenge to its Eurasian neighbors plays out, it is clear that Tehran has reinforced and

deepened all of the post-Soviet states' suspicions and fear of it, and the same undoubtedly goes for Turkey, which has declared that it has essentially given up on Assad's Syria, probably with the knowledge that this would affect its ties with Iran. Insofar as both Central Asian and South Caucasian politics are concerned, everyone regards Iran with distrust as a player who is attempting to undermine or who could develop the capability to undermine their regimes by support for Islamic organizations in their domestic arenas. Undoubtedly,

even if they will not say so publicly, these states will also harden their opposition to including Iran in the SCO or for tolerating its ongoing nuclear quest. At the same time, because these challenges to Eurasia may be linked to trends that cannot clearly be assessed in Iranian domestic politics, western observers and these states must constantly be on the lookout for an Iranian-fomented or supported crisis triggered by the efforts of one or another Iranian domestic faction with control or influence over a political faction in Azerbaijan or Central Asia to incite a crisis to strengthen its hand at home. Such possibilities only further complicate the threat calculus of Eurasian leaders. Unfortunately neither they nor anyone else need to add to that already overburdened calculus now.

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UZBEKISTAN EXPERIMENTS WITH CHECKS AND BALANCES

Farkhod Tolipov

On July 15, unique hearings were held in the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of Uzbekistan where a joint session of the Legislative Chamber and the Senate listened to the Prime Minister's Report on measures taken by the Cabinet to further deepen democratic reforms and economic liberalization. The hearings were the first of their kind in terms of making the executive power accountable to the legislative power and demonstrating the introduction of a checks and balances system. The expected vote of no-confidence in the Prime Minister thus seems postponed.

BACKGROUND: Uzbekistan's Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev reported before the Parliament on the course of reforms and the realization of the state program "The Year of Small Business and Private Entrepreneurship." The Parliament evaluated that the government's work does not meet the requirements indicated in the President's stated ambitions to further deepen democratic reforms and to support the formation of a civil society.

The parliamentary resolution says that above all, the government should increase its efforts, since the reforms have not reached their planned results. "It is important to remove all barriers to the development of private ownership, ensure the adoption of legislative acts that support the openness of the economy and enhance the role of small business and private entrepreneurship," the Resolution continues. It also points out that the issue of attracting private investors in all spheres of the economy should be resolved and that the unjustified and illegal interference of state agencies in the private sector as well as the adoption of extra bylaws are damaging the business climate and are therefore intolerable.

The Parliament expressed its concern with the lag of structural reforms in the economy, the development of high technological production

spheres and the introduction of innovative technologies. Serious attention should also be given to the issue of diversifying the economy, where the quality of produced goods is especially important. The Parliament's resolution contains a number of concrete examples of production companies, industrial objects, gas stations, road construction companies and others which are facing problems in realizing innovative modernization and technological innovation projects.

The resolution includes corresponding recommendations to the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Finances, the State tax Committee, the Trade-Industrial Chamber, the Ministry of Justice, the Central Bank, provincial administrations as well as the Parliament itself.

IMPLICATIONS: The hearings in the Oliy Majlis were supposedly unprecedented in the new stage of political reforms. This stage is related to recent trends in Uzbekistan's political process towards redistributing power between the legislative and executive branches. On November 12, 2010, at a joint session of the two parliamentary chambers of parliament, Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov advanced two interesting initiatives. Firstly, in case the incumbent is incapable of continuing



his obligations in power, these obligations should be transferred to the Chairman of the Senate of the parliament. Secondly, the party winning most seats in parliament should nominate a candidate for Prime Minister. Besides, the parliament should be awarded the right to announce a vote of no confidence in the government.

Although these initiatives were given much attention by international observers and mass media, they were actually not fundamentally novel. In November 2006, the President advanced the Constitutional Law to increase the role of political parties in the democratization of governance and the country's modernization. The law stipulates that any party's parliamentary faction can announce itself to be in opposition and that the

president nominates the Prime Minister after consultations with each faction. No parliamentary faction has since then claimed to be in opposition. Therefore, the president's new initiative, albeit quite progressive in itself, faces a significant degree of skepticism.

On the eve of the hearings, allegations arose that the parliament would make use of the legislative power and its newly acquired right to issue a vote of no confidence to get rid of the Prime Minister. However, the critical text of the parliamentary resolution did not contain such a decision with respect to the Prime Minister. On the contrary, containing many common statements and recommendations to "speed up the reforms," the resolution resembles a generally critical declaration rather than a concrete set of recommendations.

It is symptomatic and not accidental that although the Prime Minister's report was devoted to the issue of further deepening democratic reforms and economic liberalization, both his report and the resolution of the Oliy Majlis focused mostly on economic issues, and not on democratic reforms. Both documents featured some evaluations concerning the liberalization of the economy but bypassed the problems of democratization.

On the one hand, the very fact that hearings were held and that the Prime Minister presented his report before the Parliament should in itself be regarded as a positive step. On the other hand, such a half-performance of parliamentary hearings indicates the existence of a hidden agenda unrelated to the economy or democracy as such, but likely related to the internal re-configuration of the political power structures. If this process continues, it can be expected that the vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister will finally be applied. However, this would largely imply a sophisticated and controlled circulation of people in power from above. In addition, the applicability of the instrument of a vote of no confidence can be questioned in the specific context of Uzbekistan, where the political culture is less inclined to openly dismiss high ranking officials than replacing them through smoother justifications.

CONCLUSIONS: The event of July 15 was an experiment for the Oliy Majlis itself, as it once again raised the question whether the Parliament is itself a pro-reform body or just a stage for serving the interests of political elites. It should be underlined that the executive

institutions have their own space for maneuver defining their functions and responsibilities, and the Prime Minister's report to the Parliament can hardly change those functions and responsibilities.

Indeed, the hearings made the impression that the Parliament courageously sent a warning message to the Prime Minister. But at the same time, the hearings revealed a predictable unanimity within the Parliament itself, since no faction of the Oliy Majlis dared to declare itself in opposition or to speak out on the deeper social, economic and political problems of the country which undermine the democratic reforms and economic liberalization. The hearings thus focused less on the content of the report than on the fact that the report was presented.

From this point, the process can develop in two directions simultaneously. First, the state power can be restructured and redistributed through checks and balances in favor of the legislative branch, strengthening the role of the Parliament in Uzbekistan's political system. Second, the institution of a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister can be utilized to rejuvenate the political elite by the same means of checks and balances, but inside the elite itself. These two directions seem quite promising in terms of revitalizing political institutions. However, real democratic practice remains outside such reforms which, so far, touch on the form rather than the content of the political process.

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FIELD REPORTS

WORLD BANK ADVISES TAJIKISTAN TO HALT CONSTRUCTION OF HYDROPOWER STATION

Suhrob Majidov

On August 16, the World Bank in Tajikistan distributed a statement related to the construction of the Rogun hydropower station. In this statement, the World Bank recommends Tajikistan not to start constructing the dam required for the station. The international consultants, who are conducting a feasibility study for the Rogun project on behalf of the World Bank, advised Tajikistan's government to halt the start of the dam construction, which is planned for this year. Instead, the experts propose to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the planned dam.

The Rogun hydropower station is an incomplete Soviet era construction project in Tajikistan. The project was frozen following the collapse of the Soviet Union due to insufficient funding, but was reinvigorated in 2007. According to the original blueprint, the Rogun station is to become the largest in the Central Asian region with a dam of 335 meters, and a capacity to produce 3.6 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually. The station will allow Tajikistan to overcome its energy deficit and even to become the main electricity exporter in the region.

The aforementioned statement of the World Bank was made based on a 10-day visit of the Bank's team of specialists to Tajikistan. The Bank's team visited the construction area of the Rogun and Nurek hydropower stations, both situated within the Vakhsh River basin, and had a number of meetings with representatives of Tajikistan's government. The Bank's team also met with the representatives of two consulting companies – Coyne & Bellier and Poyry, which are conducting a feasibility study along with an environmental and social assessment

of the Rogun station, both funded by the World Bank.

The consulting companies presented the results of a primary ecological and social assessment and an assessment of the Rogun dam with intermediate height to the Bank's team. Considering the results of the primary assessments, the World Bank recommended the Government of Tajikistan not to construct the intermediate dam of 120 meters for the Rogun station. The main reason for this conclusion is a "high level of sedimentary materials" in the Vakhsh River which could threaten the dam. Instead, the Bank proposed to start the construction process after a comprehensive assessment is made of the whole planned dam of 350 meters which will take up to 8 months.

Last year, the World Bank and Tajikistan's government agreed that Tajikistan will not start any construction activities at the Rogun station before the feasibility study and environmental assessment are finished and discussed with independent experts and with representatives of all countries within the river basin.

The statement by the World Bank provoked a strongly negative reaction from the side of experts and politicians in Tajikistan. While there is no official reaction from the government, Tajik experts advise the Government not to pay attention to the recommendations of the World Bank and to begin the construction of the station, which is vitally important for the country, as soon as possible. Local experts assume that the World Bank made a statement in favor of Uzbekistan, which strongly opposes the construction of the Rogun station.

For instance, Bakhrom Sirojev, a member of the International Engineering Academy, believes that the Bank's specialists have made their statement "without going into the core of the issue." The expert says that there is no planned "intermediate" 120-meter dam at all. He explains that the construction of a dam is a continuous process. A 120-meter dam will only be the first stage in the process of constructing a 350-meter dam. According to Sirojev, a 120-meter dam is needed to start the first two assemblies of the station, but the dam will be constructed continuously. The expert concluded that the Bank is just "dragging away the time-frame", knowing that Tajikistan was going to start construction of the dam in November 2011.

Other local experts have a similar opinion and claim that the speedy construction of the Rogun dam is very important for other hydropower stations within the river basin. Shodi Shabdolov, the leader of the Tajik Communist Party and a Member of Parliament, claims that the urgent construction of the Rogun dam will help in overcoming the serious

silting of the Nurek hydropower station reservoir (which is downstream of the Rogun station). Shabdolov states that a delay in the construction of the Rogun station would have a negative impact for all other hydropower stations within the river basin; Nurek, Sangtuda-1 and Sangtuda-2.

Finally, local experts claim that the construction of the Rogun dam and reservoir will be beneficial for other countries within the river basin. According to local experts, the Rogun reservoir will ensure regulation of the water level in the main river of the region, Amu Darya, and will consequently enable the improvement of land recovery in the entire region, including in Uzbekistan.

While the Tajikistan's government refrains from commenting and local experts perceive the Bank's statement negatively, the World Bank's regional director for Central Asia, Motu Konishi, stated to media that there is hope that the Government of Tajikistan "will accept the recommendations and will consider the results of the primary assessments in a constructive way."

ARMENIAN AUTHORITIES NEGOTIATE WITH MAJOR OPPOSITION BLOC

Haroutiun Khachatrian

In Yerevan, a series of meetings are being held between the two delegations of the ruling coalition and the opposition Armenian National Congress (ANC) created by Armenia's first President Levon Ter-Petrosian. In the political jargon of Armenia the series of meetings, which are a unique phenomenon in the political history of Armenia, are simply called Dialogue. While negotiations between government and opposition to manage crises are overall unusual in former Soviet countries, the current dialogue features special peculiarities in the political context of Armenia.

First of all, although it is an influential political grouping, the ANC does not represent the whole

spectrum of the political opposition in Armenia. The ANC was created three years ago out of political parties and grassroots organizations that supported Ter-Petrosian in his bid to be elected President once again during the elections of February 19, 2008. They also shared the conviction that the voting on that day was greatly flawed. After the election, the ANC declared the necessity of holding early parliamentary and presidential elections as its principal goal. It says that such elections, independent of their outcomes, are necessary in order to establish a legitimate political power in the country and for resolving the political crisis initiated by previous violations, including on February 19, 2008.

The beginning of dialogue meetings was a significant victory for ANC, for several reasons. First, the very idea of negotiations was first introduced by the ANC's leader Ter-Petrosian and the authorities initially rejected it. As they later agreed to negotiate with the ANC, they simultaneously recognized it as an influential opposition force. This has been assessed negatively by numerous other opposition parties, including those who are already in parliament. Second, the authorities fulfilled a number of the ANC's demands, of which the most important was the release of political prisoners, i.e. the supporters of ANC which were formally jailed for crimes associated with the events of February 19, 2008 and especially the tragic shootings of March 1 of the same year. To set these people free the authorities declared two amnesties in 2009 and in 2011.

The authorities also had an interest in negotiating with the opposition, since this would reduce the risk of developments similar to those of the Arab spring occurring in Armenia. As shown by subsequent events, the authorities have seemingly curbed this threat. Also, negotiations between ANC and the ruling three-party coalition lend credibility to President Sargsyan's proclaimed goals of developing Armenian democracy and decreasing the role of the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), Sargsyan's own party which currently occupies over half the seats in parliament. This ambition is viewed positively by observers, who think the Dialogue may accelerate the breakdown of both the ruling coalition and the RPA itself.

Finally, the unprecedented negotiations have proven beneficial to both sides as it improves Armenia's reputation as a democratic country. In particular, Ter-Petrosian said in one of his speeches that these negotiations have enhanced the positions of Armenia in the negotiations about Nagorno-Karabakh. Currently, negotiations between the delegations of the ANC and the ruling coalition proceed as a common political process. The delegations have agreed to meet twice a week, and during one of the meetings the ANC delegation handed over an 87-page document about the necessity of holding early elections. The authorities have reportedly prepared a 135-page response which is not yet disclosed. In parallel, the delegations discuss other issues including some unlawful actions of the police and other problems which, similarly, have not been disclosed.

The negotiations thus include a wide spectrum of issues. Meanwhile, observers claim that the ANC is in fact not interested in holding early parliamentary elections as it currently lacks the necessary resources for achieving sufficient results, while regular parliamentary elections are to be held next spring. In sum, the negotiations have greatly improved the political atmosphere in Armenia, hit hard by economic and political crises. "We have never been a radical opposition" ANC representative Levon Zurabian said after one of the meetings, a statement which caused surprise among the ANC's supporters. "Rather, we are supporters of radical changes in this country," Zurabian explained.

AZERBAIJAN PROTESTS VISIT OF FRENCH MPS TO NAGORNO-KARABAKH

Mina Muradova

Baku has raised a formal protest with France and Germany over events related to the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is internationally recognized as Azerbaijani territory, but *de facto*

controlled by Armenian troops. Four members of the French National Assembly headed by Guy Teissier, Chairman of the French Assembly's defense and armed forces committee, arrived in the

breakaway region on August 22 and met with Bako Sahakian, the president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Speaking in the *de facto* parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh, Teissier, who is a member of France's ruling Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), described the trip as a gesture of "solidarity." The recent visit of French deputies shows that France pursues a policy based on double standards though this country together with Russia and the U.S. are mediating to find a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, said Malahat Ibrahimqizi, a member of the Azerbaijani Parliament from the ruling New Azerbaijan Party. "If they had good intentions in Karabakh, they would have requested permission from relevant authorities in Azerbaijan. Otherwise, I condemn their visit," she stated. The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry has sent two letters of protest to the French Foreign Ministry and the National Assembly over the visit of four deputies to the breakaway region. Elman Abdullayev, spokesman of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, said that the four deputies had been blacklisted and declared *persona non grata* in Azerbaijan. "They had to inform Azerbaijani authorities in advance about the visit. Otherwise, it is considered as disrespect for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which is a violation of the law. It is illegal visit to Azerbaijan's territory because Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognized part of Azerbaijan," Abdullayev said. Abdullayev had trouble confirming how many persons had been put on the so-called black list so far, but noted that journalists and businessmen were represented apart from deputies and state figures. "All of them will be refused visas to Azerbaijan," he stated. "The Government of Azerbaijan has the right to take measures against people who violate its territorial integrity. They have to know that the *de facto* authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh are illegitimate."

The local Trend news agency quoted Azerbaijan's Ambassador to France, Elchin Amirbekov, as saying that the French Foreign Ministry had already responded to the protest. Amirbekov quoted the

ministry as saying the four lawmakers travelled to the disputed territory on their individual initiative and did not represent the French National Assembly. Tessier, who led the delegation, represents areas of Marseille, which are heavily populated by Armenians. The French MPs' visit does not reflect the stance of Paris, the French Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bernard Valero stated.

The French Foreign Ministry posted a statement on its website on August 24 saying the trip of the MPs did not reflect a change in France's position on Nagorno-Karabakh. "France, like all countries in the international community including Armenia itself, does not recognize this territory's independence. This territory's international legal status can only be determined within the framework of a peaceful and equitable solution agreed upon by all parties concerned," the statement reads. "France, Russia, and the U.S. – the co-chairs of the OSCE's Minsk group – are trying to mediate a solution to the dispute."

A few days later, Baku sent one more letter of protest to the German Foreign Ministry demanding that a concert in Stuttgart, dedicated to the so-called independence of the internationally unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh region, be prevented. The concert is planned within the Cultural Days of Armenia in Stuttgart as part of celebrating the country's 20th anniversary of independence. It is scheduled for mid-September.

At the same time, the Azerbaijani Embassy in Germany has sent a letter to Stuttgart's mayor and called on him to prevent Armenia's provocation aimed at promoting the occupation regime politically, and to prevent deception of the German public. "People, especially state figures, have to know that the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh are illegitimate. They have to respect international law and UN conventions stating that this region is a recognized part of Azerbaijan," said a spokesman of Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry. "Any country and any businessman who has the intention to do business in the Southern Caucasus should be aware that over 70 percent of the region's total gross domestic product is produced in Azerbaijan."

SOUTH KOREA AND KAZAKHSTAN AGREE ON ENHANCED COOPERATION

Georgiy Voloshin

On August 25, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev welcomed an official South Korean delegation to Astana, headed by the President of the Republic of Korea, Lee Myun-bak. This was their fifth meeting in three years, and a result of a number of bilateral contacts at the level of officials and businesspeople. When speaking to the press at the end of talks behind closed doors, the presidents announced the effective signing of 12 agreements that are intended to strengthen cooperation between the two countries in the light of an already existing strategic partnership concluded in May 2009.

The most important bilateral achievement secured during the visit of the South Korean delegation was the signing of an Intergovernmental agreement on the development, financing, designing, exploitation and maintenance of a new power plant on Lake Balkash in South-Eastern Kazakhstan. This project has been discussed for a number of consecutive years and will provide cheaper and safer electricity to local industries that continuously suffer from unstable energy supply and thus cannot increase productive capacities. Another important deal concerns the construction and financing of a modern petrochemical complex in Atyrau, on the Caspian Sea. This ambitious enterprise, worth about US\$ 9 billion, is expected to improve Kazakhstan's capabilities in terms of exporting sophisticated gas and chemical products to final users, without recurring to the services of intermediaries, who are still in possession of better technologies than the ones that Kazakhstan has been using. The second phase of this large-scale bilateral project will be implemented by a newly created joint-venture pooling both countries' technological and managerial experience.

According to Nazarbayev, Astana and Seoul are now expecting to catch up with the pre-crisis levels of overall trade, which grew by 50 percent in 2010 and will probably reach the level of US\$ 900 million

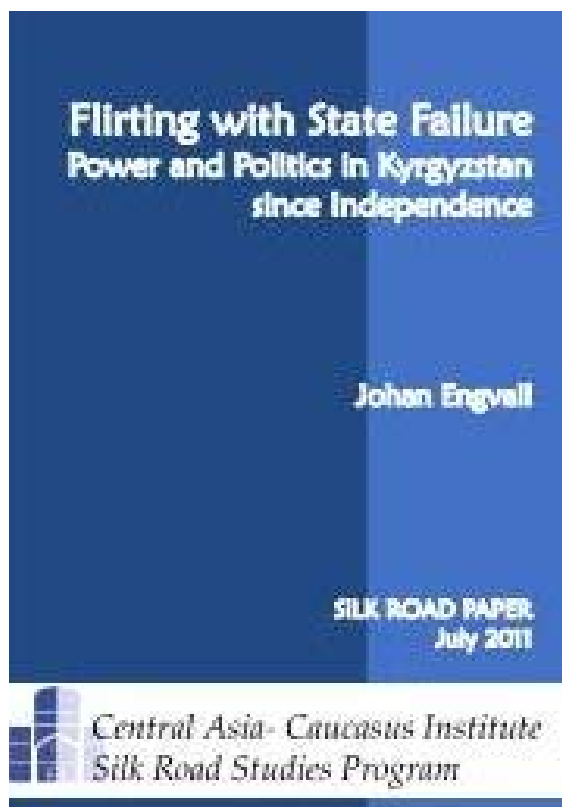
this year. This trend is only accentuated by the extensive activities of around 300 South Korean companies operating on Kazakh soil. Kazakhstan is currently home to two car making plants in its northern and eastern regions, and South Korea has become one of the leaders in terms of foreign direct investment, having already contributed almost US\$ 4 billion. In pursuit of the national strategy aimed at speedy economic diversification, Nazarbayev warmly invited the South Korean business community to participate in any of the priority industrialization projects boosted by the Kazakh Government and benefiting from privileged tax regulations.

As Myung-bak remarked in his speech, Kazakhstan was one of the few countries in the world to extend a warm and hospitable welcome to more than 150,000 ethnic Koreans subjected to mass deportations and peacefully settled across Kazakhstan's vast expanse of land. "Kazakhstan is the only country in the post-Soviet space and possibly in the whole world to have on its soil a Korean national musical and drama theater. This is the symbol of our friendship, our brotherhood and a bridge between the two nations," Nazarbayev stated, further saying that South Korean-Kazakh relations are famously friendly and stable. During the visit, the presidents made a decision to establish a joint technological center that will bring its valuable expertise to the needs of industries and science. Personal relationships have also proven to be of great importance in the development of a closer political dialogue between the two capitals. At the time when Myung-bak was Seoul's mayor, he conferred honorary citizenship on the visiting president of a newly independent Central Asian republic and even created an alley dedicated to Kazakhstan in one of the South Korean capital's most popular quarters. This time, Nazarbayev

granted honorary citizenship of Astana City to his South Korean colleague.

Amidst the ever-worsening political situation in Kazakhstan's southern neighbors, where South Korea had considerable economic interests throughout the 1990s and in the early 2000s, Kazakhstan is now becoming a preferred destination for South Korean capital. Whereas Uzbekistan once provided its soil and manpower for the assembly of Daewoo's passenger cars, Kazakhstan was later chosen for the serial production of Hyundai's mini-buses, currently very frequent and easily recognizable in Kazakh cities. As if in order to overtake its European and Asian competitors in a

bid to carve out a large chunk of lucrative contracts in the oil and gas sector, the Republic of Korea has recently been very active in promoting its own know-how in direct contacts with Kazakhstan's political representatives. It should also be remembered that the Korean ethnic community, whose unofficial leader Vladimir Ni was Nazarbayev's closest advisor before his death in late 2010, exerts considerable economic influence in various sectors of the national economy. The president of KazakhMys, the country's largest producer of mineral resources, is another ethnic Korean whose profile can be found on the Forbes' international list of billionaires.



New Silk Road Paper:

Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence

By Johan Engvall

This Silk Road Paper analyzes the foundations of politics in Kyrgyzstan, uncovering the key factors of personalities, money, and patron-client networks as means of power.

The Silk Road Paper can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to Paulette Fung at caci2@jhu.edu.

NEWS DIGEST

TURKMEN LEADER WAGES WAR ON SATELLITE DISHES

17 August

The leader of the isolated desert state of Turkmenistan on Tuesday ordered that the country get rid of its ubiquitous satellite dishes, state-run media said Tuesday. "Dozens of satellite dishes erected on top of every house spoil the appearance of buildings," Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov complained during a government meeting broadcast on state-run television. The president, who has ruled the ex-Soviet state since 2007, called for "limiting the number of satellite dishes to two or three per building." Apartment blocks and detached houses bristle with satellite dishes in a country where state media is tightly controlled and broadband Internet access is hugely expensive. Most Turkmen tune into Russian, Turkish and Arabic satellite television channels to escape relentless government propaganda on the five state-owned national channels. Turkmenistan is the only former Soviet republic without any privately-owned newspapers, magazines, television or news agencies.

Berdymukhamedov began his campaign against satellite dishes in 2008, when he charged the government with removing the dishes and replacing them with cable television in the capital Ashgabat. However, the authorities only installed cable television in a small number of apartment buildings along the main avenues, whose residents can watch around 500 channels. Turkmenistan until 2006 was ruled by eccentric president Saparmurat Niyazov, who developed a bizarre personality cult that included erecting a giant gold statue of himself and renaming the months of the year after members of his family. His successor Berdymukhamedov had taken gradual steps to remove some of the more eccentric features of the despot's rule. (AFP)

FORMER TOP KAZAKH OFFICIAL UNDER INVESTIGATION

19 August

Kazakh financial police have launched a criminal investigation against a former top official who is currently living in Switzerland, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reports. Zhandos Omiraliev, spokesman for the Kazakh Prosecutor-General's Office, told RFE/RL that police are investigating the activities of Viktor Khrapunov, who was mayor of Almaty from 1997-2004. Omiraliev said he could not provide any details into the case. Financial police officials were not available to comment. After leaving the Almaty mayoral post, Khrapunov worked as governor of his native East Kazakhstan Oblast before serving briefly as Kazakhstan's emergency situations minister. He was sacked from that post in 2007 in the wake of a scandal surrounding land parcels allegedly distributed illegally by Khrapunov when he was mayor of Almaty. In 2008, Khrapunov and several of his family members immigrated to Switzerland. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN FM MEETS WTO HEAD

22 August

Georgian Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze met with WTO Director General Pascal Lamy in Salzburg on August 20, the Georgian Foreign Ministry said on Monday. During the meeting on a sideline of an international conference Salzburg Trilogue 2011 Vashadze discussed the Swiss-mediated WTO talks between Georgia and Russia. The next round of talks between Tbilisi and Moscow on Russia's WTO entry terms is planned for mid-September. (Civil Georgia)

TWO GERMANS MISSING, FEARED KIDNAPPED IN AFGHANISTAN

23 August

German and Afghan officials said two Germans have gone missing while hiking in Afghanistan and there were fears they may have been kidnapped.

The two men vanished two days ago while hiking near the Salang Pass, a major route through the Hindu Kush mountains connecting the capital, Kabul, to northern Afghanistan. The Taliban are not active in the area where they vanished and a local official said they may have been abducted by ethnic Pashtun nomads. Westerners have occasionally been kidnapped by criminal gangs not associated with the Taliban but most have been released unharmed, often after the payment of ransom. (RFE/RL)

MOSCOW ACCUSES TBILISI OF PLOTTING 'LARGE-SCALE PROVOCATION'

23 August

Moscow accused Tbilisi on Tuesday of preparing “a large-scale provocation” on the breakaway South Ossetia’s administrative border on August 26, marking third anniversary of recognition of Georgia’s two breakaway regions by Russia. The Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on August 23, that the Georgian authorities plan an event dubbed as “peace march” during which about 3,000 Georgians, residents of Tserovani settlement for IDPs, as well as Chechen refugees living in Akhmeta district in eastern Georgia would march from the village of Odzisi to a checkpoint at Akhgori district on the South Ossetian administrative border. “Scenario of this event envisages an attempt of mass illegal penetration into the territory of South Ossetia under the slogan of return of refugees to their homes,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said. It was first reported about the allegedly planned event on July 30 by the foreign ministry of breakaway South Ossetia; last week authorities in the breakaway region again raised the issue and informed about the alleged event EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM); but the latter said it had checked the report with the Georgian authorities, which had denied it. Asked if monitors from EUMM on the ground observed any signs of preparation for the alleged event, EUMM spokesman, Steve Bird, told Civil.ge on August 23: “We have not seen anything”. In its August 23 statement the Russian Foreign Ministry also said: “This new irresponsible and provocative intention of Tbilisi is extremely dangerous.” “It is fraught with destabilization of already fragile situation in the region,” it said and added that the planned event demonstrated “cynicism” of the Georgian authorities as showed mistreatment of refugees for political goals. “We strongly warn the Georgian side against any attempts to carry out a new

adventure in the region. We hope that the appropriate unambiguous signals towards Tbilisi will also come from other members of the international community,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said. (Civil Georgia)

ABKHAZIA TO HOLD DEMOCRATIC ELECTION AUGUST 26 – ACTING PRESIDENT

25 August

The speaker of the Parliament of Abkhazia, Nugzar Ashuba, the acting president of the republic, has said that August 26 will see democratic elections. “We have witnessed true competition by three politicians in our country. All three candidates are worthy people,” said Ashuba at a meeting with observers from several European countries, Venezuela, Latvia, Nauru, the Dominican Republic, Armenia, the Dniester Moldovan Republic and also the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. According to Ashuba, Raul Khadzhimba is an experienced man, who did much for the country. Sergei Shamba in modern history is one of the founders of the struggle for the independence of the Abkhazian people, who did much for his country, including fight for its defense with weapons in hand. Alexander Ankvab is a worthy man, who has extended great services to the country and the people.” The presidential candidates, according to Ashuba, have been fulfilling their obligations under the agreement signed in July, For Honest and Clean Elections. “They have had every chance to quietly stay in Sukhumi, and communicate with their voters using modern technology, but they daily meet with them, going around every town and personally presenting their programs. This is a serious contest of ideas, not a physical confrontation between the candidates,” said the acting president. Ashuba advised observers to study the local election legislation and see for themselves how democratic it is. “We try to make presidential elections as transparent as possible,” he stressed. On August 26 Abkhazia will hold early presidential elections. Three candidates are contesting the post – Vice-President Alexander Ankvab, opposition leader Raul Khadzhimba and Prime Minister Sergei Shamba. In the 35 constituencies there have been established 172 polling stations, which will be open on the election day from 08:00 to 20:00 Moscow time. According to CEC Chairman Batal Tabagua, this time Abkhazia will not open any polling stations at military units, contrary to the previous

practice. "The CEC decided that the military should vote at ordinary civilian polling stations. We believe that this is more democratic," said Tabagua. According to preliminary statistics, 143,735 voters will be able to cast their ballots. A group of over 100 monitors will observe the elections. (RFE/RL)

AZERI ACTIVISTS DETAINED IN IRAN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTESTS

26 August

Iran's Intelligence Ministry has detained over 30 ethnic Azeris in recent days over environmental protests, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. The activists in Tabriz were protesting the Iranian government's failure to take measures to save Lake Urmia, a salt lake situated between Iran's East Azerbaijan and West Azerbaijan provinces that is drying up. Members of the activists' families told RFE/RL that over 30 people were detained on August 24 during an iftar evening meal when Muslims observing Ramadan break their fast. On August 25, several more activists were detained before and after a soccer match in Tabriz between the Azerbaijani Trakhtorsazi team and local team Shahrdari Tabriz. Thousands of Azerbaijani fans chanted "Lake Urmia is dying, the Majlis orders its execution" during the match. Several more activists were reportedly detained in Ardabil and other cities. Iran's parliament recently voted against allocating funds to channel water from the Araz River to raise the level of the lake. Instead, they proposed relocating Azerbaijanis living around Lake Urmia. Turan Kheyri, the wife of detained activist Mustafa Avazpur, told RFE/RL that he has been detained twice before for demanding the protection of Azeri rights. She says Avazpur was released from jail last year. Asgar Sadiqi, the brother of detained activist Abdullah Sadiqi said Abdullah telephoned them to say he was being held at an Intelligence Ministry facility in Tabriz. He said the ministry did not inform the family why Abdullah was arrested. Vahid Qaradagli, an Azeri human rights activist in Iran, told RFE/RL on August that Azeri activists are enraged at the Iranian government's failure to take measures to prevent Lake Urmia from drying up. "The activists were planning more protests on August 27, and the government is arresting activists to avert the wave of protests," he said. Qaradagli says the government has built a fence around the lake, but no steps have been taken to preserve it. He says if the lake dries up, some 10 million tons of salt will remain which will damage the environment

and may cause illness among people living in the vicinity. (RFE/RL)

MEDVEDEV CONGRATULATES ANKVAB ON VICTORY

27 August

Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev congratulated Alexander Ankvab on "convincing victory" in the Friday's presidential election in the breakaway region, according to the Kremlin. Kremlin said in a statement released less than a couple of hours after the breakaway region's central election commission announced election results, that Medvedev spoke with Ankvab by the phone and "wished him success." "Medvedev and Ankvab spoke in favor of further strengthening of the Russian-Abkhaz partnership," the Kremlin said. Ankvab said at a news conference in Sokhumi on Saturday, that he would continue course of late Abkhaz leader, Sergey Bagapsh, "who was keen supporter of relations with Russia and we will further develop those ties." "We will demonstrate to the world, that Russia made a right decision by recognizing our independence," Ankvab said. (Civil Georgia)

AZERBAIJAN SENDS NOTE TO GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

27 August

Azerbaijan has sent a note to the German Foreign Ministry demanding to prevent holding of a concert dedicated to the Nagorno-Karabakh separatist regime in the German city of Stuttgart, Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry said. Within the Days of Armenian Culture in Stuttgart, a concert "20th anniversary of Artsakh" dedicated to the so-called "20th anniversary of independence" of the puppet regime in Nagorno-Karabakh is scheduled for Sept.16-22.

At the same time, the Azerbaijani Embassy in Germany has sent a letter to Stuttgart mayor asking not to allow this Armenian provocation on political propaganda of the occupation regime and prevent deceiving the German public.

Azerbaijan Embassy continues working to stop the Armenian provocations. (Trend)

AFGHAN PRESIDENT SENDS WOULD-BE CHILD SUICIDE BOMBERS HOME

30 August

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has ordered that eight would-be child suicide bombers be sent back to their families. The group, which contains a 7-year-old, are the youngest among some 20 children who

authorities said were detained before conducting suicide attacks across the country. Karzai, speaking as he marked the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, said the children had been deceived by the Taliban. "We repeatedly ask the Taliban and those who have guns on their shoulders to put their guns down and join the reconstruction process of their country," he said, "and not force or deceive the children into destroying their country." Karzai met the eight children last week in Kabul before ordering that they be sent home. Officials had said the remaining 12 children, all under 18, would be returned to their homes after education and reintegration programs. (RFE/RL)

SECURITY OFFICER KILLED IN INGUSHETIA

30 August

An officer with the Russian Federal Security Service died Tuesday in a car bombing as violence continued in the North Caucasus. The killing occurred in Nazran, the largest city in the Russian republic of Ingushetia, RIA Novosti reported. A police officer was killed Saturday in Ingushetia and a police station in neighboring Dagestan was attacked Friday. Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya, all between the Black and Caspian seas and bordered on the south by Georgia and Azerbaijan, have large Muslim populations. While Russia plays up violence perpetrated by nationalists and extremist Muslims in the North Caucasus, peaceful opposition leaders and human rights advocates have also been killed. In June, Maksud Sadikov, the rector of Dagestan's Institute of Theology, was shot in his car in Makhachkala, and last year Maksharip Ashev, an Ingush opposition leader, was found dead in his bullet-riddled car, a Foreign Policy blogger reported. (UPI)

U.S. REITERATES THAT IT DOES NOT RECOGNIZE ELECTIONS IN ABKHAZIA

30 August

U.S. Administration does not recognize the results of Friday's presidential election in the Republic of Abkhazia, a senior spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of State told a daily press briefing Monday. "[...] the United States does not recognize the legitimacy or the results of the August 26 so-called elections," said Victoria Nuland, the spokeswoman. She referred to Abkhazia as a "region of Georgia." "We reiterate our support for Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders," Nuland said.

"We urge Russia to fulfill all of its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire agreement, including withdrawal of forces to pre-conflict positions and free access for humanitarian assistance to the territories," she said. Russia recognized the state sovereignty and independence of two former regions of Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, at the end of August 2008. (Itar-Tass)

AFGHANISTAN JOINS TAJIKISTAN, KYRGYZ REPUBLIC CROSS-BORDER TRANSPORT ACCORD

30 August

Afghanistan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have finalized an agreement that will allow Afghanistan to take part in a cross-border transport accord recently ratified by the two Central Asian countries. The CBTA, signed under the framework of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program, will ease the movement of goods, vehicles, and people across international borders, said a press statement received here from Asian Development Bank, Associated Press of Pakistan reported. Vehicles and goods from participating countries will be able to cross designated borders faster, thanks to streamlined customs inspections and reduced requirements to transfer shipments between vehicles. Established in 2001, CAREC brings together Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It promotes the implementation of regional projects in energy, transport, and trade facilitation. Senior officials from the Central Asian neighbors agreed on Afghanistan's accession to the Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) at a meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan signed the CBTA in December 2010. To date, member governments, ADB, and other international financial institutions have approved over 100 CAREC-related projects worth about \$16 billion. These projects include six land transport corridors that cover 3,600 km of roads and 2,000 km of railway while they traverse the CAREC region north-south and east-west, linking Europe, East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. Officials from Afghanistan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan will sign a protocol on Afghanistan's accession to the CBTA at the 10th CAREC Ministerial Conference to be held in Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2011. The CBTA will ultimately connect East Asia and the Arabian Sea

through Central Asia, specifically along the route of CAREC Corridor 5. In Afghanistan, the Corridor starts at Torkham at the border with Pakistan, continuing through Jalalabad to Kabul, Kunduz, and Shirkhan Bandar.

From the Tajikistan border crossing of Nizhni Pianj, Corridor 5 passes through Kurgan Tyube, Dushanbe, and Karamik. In the Kyrgyz Republic, it runs to the PRC border via Karamik, Sary Tash, and Irkeshtan. (Trend)

MONUMENT TO CHINGIZ AITMATOV WAS PUT UP

30 August

"Aitmatov's creativity said the rule of conscience. We can not say that the economy is primary in the life of the state and the culture is secondary after Aitmatov. Seek for the figure equivalent Aitmatov in today's Kyrgyzstan," said the President for transitional period of the Kyrgyz Republic Roza Otunbayeva, 24.kg reported. According to her, Chingiz Aitmatov is a global spiritual phenomenon that has had impact on the lives of Kyrgyz people. "We have to protect our cultural heritage, where the works of Aitmatov shine as a star of the first magnitude. His Literary masterpieces opened Kyrgyzstan to the world. And today we call eye at that time when were admired Aitmatov's heroes-ordinary working people of our land," said Roza Otunbayeva. "Today our people does not need high moral abutments but the heroes of Aitmatov lived by. Two great figures determine our political scale today - the Generous Manas and Chingiz Aitmatov. They define the extent of our responsibility to the homeland," concluded the President. (24.kg)

KAZAKHSTAN SAYS DETAINS EXTREMISTS, FOILS "TERROR"

31 August

Kazakhstan's security forces have detained a group of extremists who had planned "acts of terror" in the oil-producing region of Atyrau, local prosecutors said in a report on Wednesday. The report is a rare official admission of such threats in Kazakhstan, Central Asia's largest and most successful economy which has always stressed its stability contrasting the volatility of its regional ex-Soviet neighbours. "On August 29, security forces disrupted the activity of a terrorist group, and 18 people were detained," the prosecutor's office in Atyrau in western Kazakhstan said in a statement e-mailed to Reuters. "During the detention, one of the members of this gang put up staunch resistance and was destroyed."

Kazakhstan, where 70 percent of the 16.5 million population are Muslim, has so far avoided the militant Islamist violence that has hit other parts of Central Asia, a region that borders Afghanistan. But a recent series of unexplained explosions and shootouts with well-armed gunmen in various parts of the country have unnerved the authorities of Kazakhstan, run by strongman President Nursultan Nazarbayev for more than 20 years. Interfax news agency quoted Atyrau Prosecutor Sayfulla Kamalov as telling a news briefing earlier on Wednesday that the detainees were all men living in the region who had also planned attacks in other parts of the country. Kamalov said that components of an explosive device, religious literature and firearms had been found at the house of the man who had been shot dead. "To date, the above-mentioned 18 persons have been charged with 'creating, leading and taking part in the activities of a terrorist group'," the statement said. It gave no further details. "The criminal situation in the region remains stable, and all institutions, organisations and enterprises work as usual," the report said. "Security bodies are taking all necessary measures to safeguard public security."

Earlier this month, Kazakhstan temporarily blocked access to a number of foreign Internet sites, including the popular blogging space LiveJournal, after a court ruled they were propagating terrorism and inciting religious hatred. (Reuters)

8 DEAD, INCLUDING 7 POLICE, IN CHECHNYA SUICIDE BOMBINGS

31 August

Russia's top investigative body says eight people including seven policeman have died after suicide bombings in the capital of Chechnya. A statement from the Investigative Committee says three perpetrators of the Tuesday evening blasts in Grozny have been identified, but did not specify how many explosions there were. Some Russian news reports said there were two blasts. According to the Wednesday statement, the bombers blew themselves up when police stopped them during a search operation. A further 22 people were wounded, the committee said. The blasts were the bloodiest recent incident of violence in Chechnya, where an Islamic insurgency has diminished after two full-scale wars with Russian forces over the past two decades. The neighbouring republic of Dagestan is plagued by near-daily insurgent violence and clashes with police. (AP)

AMBASSADOR: AZERBAIJANI-TURKISH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL SUMMIT TO BE HELD SOON

30 August

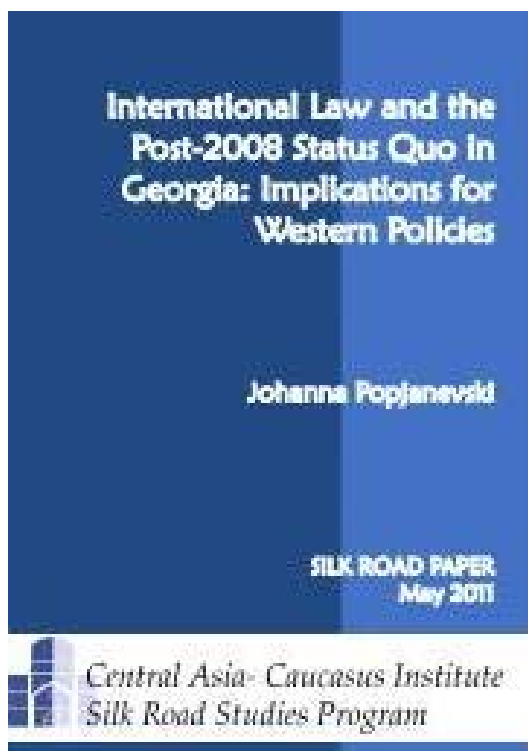
The Azerbaijani-Turkish Strategic Partnership Council Summit is scheduled for October-November, Turkish Ambassador to Azerbaijan Hulusi Kilic told reporters on Tuesday. "The council meeting will be held either in October or November," said Kilic. The agreement on strategic partnership and mutual assistance between Azerbaijan and Turkey was signed by the presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkey Ilham Aliyev and Abdullah Gul on Aug. 16, 2010. The ambassador said that after Azerbaijan regained its independence, military cooperation between the two countries strengthened day-by-day. "The Azerbaijani army is becoming the most powerful army in the region," said Kilic. The ambassador said Azerbaijan and Turkey have always supported peace. (Trend)

TWO CHECHNYA SUICIDE BOMBERS IDENTIFIED

31 August

Investigators established the identities of two suicide bombers who blasted themselves in Grozny's Lenin district on Tuesday. "One of them is Magamed Dashayev, 22, a native of Urus Martan, and the other is resident of the village of Starye Atagi, student of the Oil Institute Adlan Khamidov,

aged 21," Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin told Itar-Tass. The explosions occurred in Bogdan Khmel'nitsky Street on Tuesday evening. Seven people were killed outright, and another 23 were injured. Several hours later, the eighth victim died in hospital despite the provided medical assistance. The press service of the Chechen leader reported that there were six police officers, one employee of the Emergency Situations Ministry and one local resident among the fatalities. "Twenty-two people remain in hospitals; of those, five are in a critical condition," the press service said. According to Markin, an SK investigator was injured in one of the explosions. He was not far from the scene when he was returning from work, and was injured in a new explosion when he tried to render assistance to victims, he said. Chechen police said there had been three explosions. The first bomb was set off, when a police patrol tried to detain a suspicious man. When more police and local residents gathered at the scene, another two suicide bombers blew themselves up in the crowd. The criminal case was opened under five articles of Russia's Criminal Code: "attempted murder of law-enforcement personnel," "murder," "attempted murder," "Illegal turnover of weapons," and "illegal manufacturing of weapons." The case will be handled by the SK's department for the North Caucasus Federal District. (Itar-Tass)



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