

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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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.

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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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WHITHER THE NEW SILK ROAD AND U.S. CENTRAL ASIA POLICY?

Stephen Blank

As the U.S. and ISAF forces leave Afghanistan, U.S. policy in Central Asia must necessarily change too, from a primarily military strategy into one based on economics and political support. Continued military emphasis is ruled out because there is no discernible military threat other than Afghanistan, because Washington cannot afford protracted military deployments, and because such deployments would further antagonize Moscow and Beijing and confirm those governments' deepest suspicions about U.S. objectives. However, can the New Silk Road, Washington's highly touted economic program of building infrastructure and trading networks among Central and South Asian states, fill the place of military forces in enhancing security and stability in Central Asia?

BACKGROUND: According to U.S. officials, Washington is intent on deepening its relationships with Central Asian states even as the Afghan withdrawals progress through 2014. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake, Washington's point man for Central Asia, recently endorsed an idea espoused by several analysts: converting the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) into a vehicle for the expansion of intra-regional trade among Central Asian states and as a vehicle for expanding their trade with the wider world. Yet, the question remains whether the idea remains feasible under present circumstances.

The NDN emerged in 2008-09 out of talks with Central Asian states and Russia as a route allowing the U.S. and NATO to ship nonlethal supplies to Afghanistan without going through Pakistan and the Khyber Pass – logistical arrangements exposed to Taliban attacks as well as massive delays due to Pakistani obstruction. It was a military analogue to the U.S. policy dating from 2006 of stimulating greater economic investment and trade between Central and South Asia, to rebuild Afghanistan and to give Central Asian states options other than Russia or China.

Undoubtedly some of these projects have moved forward, e.g. Central Asian states providing electricity for Afghanistan from their surplus power generation, Uzbekistan's construction of a rail line to Mazar-i-Sharif, and the conception of several new infrastructural projects such as the projected TAPI gas pipeline. Yet, there are many obstacles to realizing this grand design and Washington knows it.

First, relations among Central Asian states are very tense, particularly Uzbekistan's relations with its Tajik and Kyrgyz neighbors. Indeed, Uzbekistan has repeatedly undertaken actions amounting to economic warfare and disruption of trade affecting these states quarrels over water, geopolitics, and ethnopolitical issues. For a viable regional trade network to function, such behavior must stop. But who will induce or even compel Uzbekistan to behave differently when it is Washington's key ally in the region and highly adept at playing off rival great powers? In addition, Afghanistan's neighbors eagerly talk the talk of solving common problems but simultaneously seek to exploit Afghanistan's problems for their benefit. For example, Tajik officials regularly present international donors with long lists of "win-win" cross-

border development plans that, they insist, must be built in Tajikistan. Afghanistan only benefits much later if at all.

Second, in addition to trade wars among Central Asian states, there are far too many cases of state interference in border trade and crossings which have become lucrative venues for entrenched bureaucrats and officials to impose fines, penalties, and payments to line their pockets with official protection while impeding trade. These factors ratify the numerous scholarly findings concerning the many serious obstacles that are deliberately being erected against any form of regional cooperation that will vitiate hopes of maximizing the potential of the NDN or the New Silk Road.

IMPLICATIONS: While Washington has eloquently advocated on behalf of the New Silk Road program, it is unable or unwilling to pay the amount of money needed to make it work. In his speech, Assistant Secretary Blake cited the funds pledged at Tokyo for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Yet, that sum was not even what the Afghan government asked for and as we have seen countless times before, pledges do not amount to actual donations and one cannot rely on money that is not there.

Furthermore, while military assistance to Afghanistan and Central Asia appeared to be growing until 2012, other forms of aid are apparently declining. Under expected conditions of future U.S. budgetary stringency we can expect a decline in military assistance too. Indeed, funding for Afghanistan is already being reduced while the new decisions announced in February 2012 will bring even greater and major funding cuts for both civil and military programs. Moreover, it is probably the case that no amount of available funding could meet the needs hitherto identified in Afghanistan. The Pentagon has now halved the requested funding for the Afghan National Security

Forces (ANSF) in the FY 2013 budget, an odd decision since the ANSF's development is the condition for the U.S. leaving sooner rather than later.

Similarly, the Majority Staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee found that Civilian assistance for all countries in Central Asia was US\$ 186.2 million in FY 2010 and is on a downward trajectory. Peace and security assistance to the region increased from US\$ 70 million in FY 2001 to US\$ 257 million in FY 2010, though it too may actually be declining now. Overall, U.S. assistance to the countries of Central Asia is relatively small compared to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In FY 2010, total U.S. assistance to Central Asia amounted to under three percent (US\$ 436.24 million) of what was spent in Afghanistan (US\$ 14.78 billion).

Neither is there any real pressure to relieve this downward pressure. When this author queried State Department officials in December 2011 about the future of funding and the spending needed to turn the New Silk Road into something more than a rhetorical contrivance, all he heard was a shamefaced silence. Similarly, the majority staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee published a report strongly advising support for the project in late 2011, yet there has been no word from the White House or the government supporting that endeavor. Indeed, the President has not bothered to say a word in public about supporting the New Silk Road project despite the obvious priority of Afghanistan.

Without sustained political leadership that induces major domestic reforms in Central Asia and substantial appropriations, this project will not realize the hopes vested in it. Russia and China may fear the U.S. presence, but if the U.S. deems Central Asia to be a geopolitically critical region it will have to pay for its interests, which appears to be increasingly unlikely to occur despite the

rhetoric. Neither Afghanistan, nor Central Asia, is mentioned in the U.S. election campaigns, suggesting an elite disinterest in those issues.

Given the enormous sums needed to prevent Afghanistan from becoming primarily an aid economy, and the lack of this investment from Washington, any substantive improvement on the basis of Western aid is unlikely. If China takes up the slack, that will have foreseeable strategic consequences. It will certainly undermine India's efforts in Afghanistan which are already under pressure because previous U.S. support has given India secure space to work there in the face of Chinese and Pakistani objections to its presence. Russia will be unable to fill the vacuum left by the U.S. and ISAF and pressure will therefore reduce pressure on Central Asian leaders to reform and reduce the obstacles to trade and regional cooperation. Ultimately it seems that Washington underestimates how much its sustained presence contributes to Central Asia's stabilization and how much it is wanted by local actors.

CONCLUSIONS: The State Department's rhetoric about the Silk Road and the NDN is very positive but there is little behind it. As experience should tell us,

one cannot build a sustainable policy in or for Central Asia on the basis of rhetoric alone. There appears to be insufficient U.S. understanding of the region's strategic importance or the requirements for long-term sustained investment of resources on a large scale. If Washington thinks the area is important it ought to say so and allocate the resources necessary to reinforce success. Otherwise the gap between rhetoric and reality will remain and investments that are made will essentially be reinforcing failure, which only opens the door to continued stasis and intensified great power rivalry in a region whose importance is arguably growing. One can only hope that whoever wins the upcoming U.S. elections will develop a coherent Central Asia policy that grasps the area's strategic importance for the U.S. and can credibly match resources to goals. Otherwise, whatever we say or think about our military performance in Afghanistan will merely be written on the wind and our efforts there will leave not a rack behind.

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AFTER AFGHANISTAN, CENTRAL ASIAN JIHADISTS LOOK TO NEW THEATRES

Jacob Zenn

As fighters from militant groups based in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia transfer from one theater to other “hot” conflict zones, they are able to share their experiences and skills with a newer, younger generation of militants. Militants who are European citizens are uniquely valuable in this form of knowledge transfer because their passports allow them to travel with less scrutiny than non-Europeans. The recently made public story of Moez Garsallaoui, a Tunisian-born Swiss citizen who became the amir of Jund al-Khilafah and mentored the French citizen of Algerian descent Mohammed Merah, exemplifies how this knowledge transfer works and how it can help internationalize otherwise nationally or regionally-oriented militant groups.

BACKGROUND: On October 15, 2012, a posting on the shmukh al-Islam online Jihadist forum eulogized Garsallaoui as a “hero of heroes of the ummah.” His wife was Malika al-Aroud, whose first husband, Dahmane Abd al-Sattar, was the Tunisian-born al-Qaeda operative who pretended to be a journalist in order to access the Afghanistan Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Massoud two days before September 11. His aide, pretending to be a cameraman, detonated explosives hidden in the camera, killing Massoud, al-Sattar and the cameraman in Takhar Province, Afghanistan on September 9.

Garsallaoui was tech-savvy and ran jihadist websites with al-Aroud in Switzerland, but he also had the ambition to become an al-Qaeda legend like al-Aroud’s first husband. In early 2008, Garsallaoui used his Swiss passport and his wife’s connections to militants in Pakistan to travel to Pakistan’s tribal areas, where he participated in al-Qaeda-run training camps in the region. Within months, he sent home to al-Aroud a picture of himself with a rocket-propelled grenade and told her that he had killed several Americans.

Garsallaoui resurfaced in October and December 2011, when he released one online

posting criticizing the democratic transition in his native Tunisia and a second posting praising Jund al-Khilafah (JaK), an al-Qaeda-affiliated militant group based in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions, whose three founders were from Kazakhstan and whose mission was to overthrow the government of Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan. JaK carried out three attacks in Atyrau, Taraz and Almaty in late 2011 and issued several statements about overthrowing Nazarbayev.

In March 2012, JaK unexpectedly issued a statement on an al-Qaeda online forum claiming Mohammed Merah’s attacks in southwest France, which killed 3 Jews and 4 French paratroopers of North African descent. In a second statement, “Abu Qaqa al-Andalusi” – a common pseudonym for North Africans – claimed to have known “the brother (Merah) up close, and sat with him on many occasions and for a short time guided him.” Before Merah was killed by police in southwest France, he told the French security forces during the negotiations for him to surrender that he had been encouraged to launch an attack in France by an al-Qaeda leader who had been to France. Western intelligence sources have now revealed that it

was Garsallaoui who trained the three Kazakh founders of JaK as well as Merah, both of which have committed deadly attacks in Kazakhstan and France, respectively.

IMPLICATIONS: Garsallaoui was not only responsible for training JaK – and then becoming JaK’s amir – but also inspiring Mohammed Merah to carry out attacks in France. Other European militants are similarly changing the orientation of militant groups in Central Asia. The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which was formerly known as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), for example, used to be focused on Xinjiang, China and “liberating” the region from Communist Chinese rule. While it still maintains this goal, it has now become equally enmeshed in fighting the Americans in Afghanistan, as well as promoting militancy in other theatres such as Chechnya and Turkey. Recent TIP propaganda, for example, has featured Russians and Turks – not Uyghurs – who do not talk about China, but rather about the need for Russians and Turks, including women, to join the jihad in Afghanistan.

In other cases, the introduction of foreign fighters into Central Asia has expanded certain groups’ interest in and awareness of other “hot” theatres. For example, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was principally focused on Uzbekistan before 2001 and later became focused on fighting the Pakistani army and the U.S. in Afghanistan during the 2000s, since it was closely allied to the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistani (TTP). However, the latest propaganda statement on October 19 issued by the IMU’s mufti Abu Zar al-Burmi, an ethnic Rohingya from

Burma by origin, said, “In Mali, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Somalia, there is a jihad going on, dear brothers. This is the victory of us - the mujahideen.” The video in which al-Burmi’s statement appeared was notable for being one of the rare times that sub-Saharan Africans, who were reportedly Somalis, were seen in Afghanistan fighting alongside the Central Asian insurgents.

Many battle-hardened militants will be leaving Afghanistan when most U.S. troops withdraw from the country in 2014. As al-Burmi noted, the “hot” theater today is in Mali, where an insurgency led by a coalition of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and two other militias control the northern two-thirds of the country. Already Pakistanis and Frenchmen, among other nationalities, have been reported among the insurgents, and more will likely join as Western countries and



West African countries, as expected, launch a military intervention in 2013.

Central Asians are now some of the most experienced militants after having fought for more than ten years in Afghanistan, so they will likely be able to bring expertise and ideological “mentorship” to the young insurgents in northern Mali, just as Garsallaoui provided to the JaK founders and

Merah, who arrived in Pakistan sometime in 2011, when Garsallaoui was already a three-year veteran. Moreover, fighters who travel to foreign countries outside of their native region to fight often are the most motivated because they would not journey so far simply to retreat or surrender, as locals who were coerced to join the insurgents might do.

CONCLUSIONS: Europeans like Garsallaoui and the Turks and Chechens in the TIP have changed the outlook of Central Asian militant groups, which focus as much on the international jihadist movements as their own. Now Central Asians, experienced in combat and with an international outlook, appear to be ready to move to the next “hot” theater in West Africa, where they can provide operational combat expertise and

leadership to a new crop of northern Malians who have been recruited into AQIM’s coalition in the country. While they may not have the ease of travel of Europeans, there are a number of fighters like Garsallaoui and Merah that hold European citizenship fighting in Central Asia now. They may play a key role in bringing the Afghan battlefield to Mali in the months and years to come.

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TATARSTAN INFLUENCED BY NORTH CAUCASUS RESISTANCE

Dmitry Shlapentokh

On 19 July, 2012, a car bomb seriously wounded the mufti Il'dus Faizov in Tatarstan while his deputy, Valiulia Iakupov, was shot dead. Almost simultaneously, a pro-government mufti was shot in Dagestan. It has been argued that the three attacks are related, implying that North Caucasian jihadists are making inroads into Russia's heartland. Indeed, the murders indicated a clear escalation of violence in Tatarstan. The specter of interconnections between the North Caucasian resistance and jihadists in the Volga region has increased with the declining influence of moderate Tatar nationalism, giving way to a new popular ideological makeup merging nationalism with jihadism as the ideology and practice of anti-Moscow resistance.

BACKGROUND: Tatar nationalism is a direct product of the political context in which it is evolved. More than any other enclave in Russia aside from the North Caucasus, Tatarstan benefited from Moscow's weakening grip over Russian provinces in early post-Soviet era. In 1992, the idea of a Federation Compact (*Federativnyi dogovor*) had emerged and an agreement was signed between Tatarstan and Moscow in 1994, providing considerable autonomy for Kazan. While receiving considerable concessions from the Kremlin, the Tatar elite was not willing to push for complete independence in the beginning of Yeltsin's tenure, especially as it became clear through the first war in Chechnya that Moscow would use force to stop Russia from disintegrating. In light of this understanding, the Tatar elite led by then President Mintimer Shaimiev proposed several models of moderate Tatar nationalism, providing the ideological framework for Kazan's collaboration with Moscow. Following this design, Shaimiev propagandized the notion of a peculiar "Bulgarian civilization," proclaimed to be as important as any other ancient civilization. It was stated not only that the Bulgar Kingdom – the ancient Turkic state on the territory of

modern Tatarstan – was founded by Alexander the Great but was also converted to the Islamic faith directly by associates of the Prophet Muhammad. Several local historians studied the Bulgarian civilization, with direct support from the authorities. In their interpretation, the Bulgarian Kingdom had emerged in parallel with the Kievan Rus', considered the civilizational ancestor of Russia as well as Ukraine and Belarus, and the peaceful coexistence between the Bulgarian and Kievan states was clearly implicated in the narrative. Thus, the Orthodox and Muslim civilizations were viewed not as antagonistic but rather "complimentary" and existing in some sort of Gumilevian "symbiosis." Unsurprisingly, Kremlin ideologists were pleased with such interpretation of history especially as Shaimiev insisted that Islam and Orthodox Christianity, and consequently Russians and Tatars, had lived in beneficial "symbiosis" for centuries.

However, this ideology and even more so its practice increasingly became challenged by some segments of the Tatar population who want complete independence. In addition, the ideology of jihadism started to spread in Tatarstan. This was not missed by the leadership of the North Caucasian resistance

who increasingly cooperate with Tatar nationalists and jihadists alike, extending their armed struggle far beyond the North Caucasus, apparently with substantial help from Volga jihadists. The process started in the late Yeltsin era or even earlier, when Tatars became exposed to the influence of foreign Islamists. The spread of Islamism has corresponded with the spread of Tatar nationalism, which has not opposed, but rather embraced, jihadism. Indeed, common animosity toward Moscow has increasingly encouraged an amalgamation of Tatar jihadists and hardcore nationalists.



IMPLICATIONS: Events in the North Caucasus have strongly influenced developments in Tatarstan. The first Chechen War, mostly waged under nationalist slogans, was appealing to Tatar nationalists who saw in the Chechen resistance a template to follow in Tatarstan. One prominent example is the Tatar activist Rafis Kashapov, who was handed a suspended sentence in 2009 for articles protesting the russification of Tatarstan and was initially presumed to have been killed during an October 24 shootout in Kazan between law enforcement and suspects of the July attacks. However, it turned out he was confused with a killed suspect with the same surname. Kashapov has hardly been alone in praising the Chechen resistance. An

activist holding similar views is Aidar Khalim, a nationalist who promoted separatist ideas in writings such as the book “This is Unvanquished Chechen or You Shall Repent Russia!” (Etot nepobedimyi chechenets, ili kaisia Rus’!), which praised the Chechen resistance.

Yet, the interaction between Tatar and North Caucasian Islamists increased as well and by 2006, the latter’s leader Dokku Umarov appointed a new commander for the Volga and Ural fronts. In 2007, Umarov proclaimed the “Caucasian Emirate” based on internationalist jihadism, which also

encouraged Tatar jihadism and cooperation between Tatar and North Caucasian jihadists. As time progressed, the North Caucasian jihadists increasingly became the leading force in formatting the jihad in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. At the same time, the logic following from the conflict with Moscow has also led North Caucasian jihadists to embrace Tatar nationalists. In fact, they support nationalism

in the Tatar setting as a force directed against the Kremlin – the ultimate enemy of the North Caucasian resistance.

In 2011, Umarov proclaimed that Caucasian Islamists shall move to the Volga region to incite local Tatars to jihad. The role of the North Caucasian resistance as an inspirational model for Tatarstan jihadists was later confirmed by a certain Saliif, a North Caucasian jihadist interviewed for the internet publication *APN*. According to Rais Suleimanov, a leading pro-Moscow expert on Islam and nationalism in Tatarstan, the influence of North Caucasian jihadists can easily be recorded in Tatarstan mosques, while Tatar youth has sought to imitate “Caucasians” and were fascinated by the

“video preaching of Said Buriatskii” and similar individuals. Indeed, according to some reports by Suleimanov and others, jihadists from the North Caucasus have become the teachers of jihadists in Tatarstan and ten percent of Tatarstan’s jihadists are motivated to take up arms.

While jihadism has a strong internationalist underpinning in the context of the North Caucasus, the situation is quite different in Tatarstan where internationalist jihadism has become interwoven with Tatar nationalism. Indeed, one could see an invocation of Tatar nationalism in Umarov’s early calls for jihad in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. He called the region “Idel-Ural,” a name used by Tatar nationalist Gaiaz Iskhaki (1878-1954), who dreamed of creating an independent Tatar state which borders largely corresponding to the Kazan Kingdom.

Besides encouraging jihadism as an ideology, North Caucasian fighters have provided their Tatar counterparts with military training and advice. Some of the Volga region’s jihadists, upon receiving training or apprenticeship either in the North Caucasus or abroad, have returned to Tatarstan. This seems to be a most troubling development for the local law enforcement. Indeed, according to Tatarstan’s chief of police, the region’s greatest security problem stems from individuals who received military training in Dagestan, Pakistan, or other countries.

While the North Caucasian resistance provides an important impetus for Tatar jihadism, the partnership goes both ways. Some young Tatars who departed to the North Caucasus for military training never returned to Tatarstan but instead became

active participants in the North Caucasian resistance who fought in the second Chechen War (1999-2001) and later engaged in suicide terrorism. It is quite likely that North Caucasian jihadists were behind the summer terrorist attacks, signifying the increasing symbiosis between ideologically different violent forces united in their opposition to the Kremlin.

CONCLUSIONS: Tatarstan is a secularized Muslim enclave in Russia. In the beginning of post-Soviet era, many Tatars held nationalist sentiments which elites in both Moscow and Kazan sought to transform into the benign pro-Moscow neo-Eurasianism. Yet, the conflict between Tatar nationalists and Moscow provided for ties with the North Caucasian resistance. The radical Islamism on the part of some Tatar nationalists emerged not as an ideology opposing nationalism but actually reinforcing it in the peculiar context of the Volga region. As a result, a peculiar alliance is being shaped between North Caucasian jihadists, Tatar jihadists and Tatar nationalists. In fact, this symbiosis between Tatar nationalists and jihadists could possibly evolve into cooperation between jihadists and certain segments of the hardcore Russian nationalists, provided the latter’s hatred of the regime outweighs their antipathies toward people of “Caucasian nationality.” Jihadists have proven to be quite flexible in their alliances and Kavkaz Center frequently praises either directly or indirectly Russian nationalists and other nominally opposed groups, for their confrontation with Moscow.

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UZBEKISTAN REINTRODUCES AFGHANISTAN INITIATIVE AT UNGA SESSION

Farkhod Tolipov

At the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Uzbekistan's Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov proposed to establish a Contact Group on Afghanistan under the aegis of the UN. The proposal, however, was reminiscent of an initiative put forward by Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov in 2008: the creation of a "6+3" group, which has since then not gained international support. The initiative is marred by its narrow view on what constitutes Afghanistan's neighborhood, which tends to exclude crucial external actors from the conflict resolution process. It also fails to recognize the UN's leadership potential in this process.



BACKGROUND: The Uzbek Foreign Minister noted at the 67th UNGA Session that intractable problems can arise in connection with the anticipated drawdown of international forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and the handover of responsibility for maintaining stability in the country to Afghan security forces. He expressed apprehension with regard to the specter of a destabilized situation in Afghanistan and neighboring countries due to the rise of extremism and growth of illegal drug traffic in the region.

In such a situation, Kamilov said, the most appropriate way to solve the Afghan problem is the creation of Contact group under the UN aegis composed by Afghanistan's neighbors and the U.S., NATO and Russia. He stressed that the main purpose of the group should be

to achieve a compromise between rival groups and the formation of a government representing the basic ethnic and religious factions involved in the conflict.

Four years ago, at the Bucharest NATO summit in April 2008, President Karimov advanced the so-called "6+3" initiative with the same composition and the same purpose. Uzbekistan's representatives have later reiterated this initiative a number of times, demonstrating some sort of diplomatic activism regarding the situation in Afghanistan.

In fact, Uzbekistan initiated the so called "6+2" format of negotiations already in 1998, which included all 6 neighbors of Afghanistan along with the U.S. and Russia. The format was designed as a diplomatic forum for "neighbors and friends" of Afghanistan to meet regularly and discuss avenues for ending the war and establishing peace. It implied, among other things, face to face talks between the two sides of the Afghan war in order to reach some form of agreement.

The first talks of the "6+2" group were held in July 1999 in Tashkent, leading to the adoption of the Tashkent Declaration. This format of negotiations existed from 1999 until 2001 and was interrupted immediately after the 9/11 attacks, which ended all previous attempts to resolve the Afghan conflict. The very limited

impact of the “6+2” and rejection of the “6+3” format revealed the inherent constraints of any regional framework for conflict resolution in Afghanistan. In this perspective, Uzbekistan’s new take on an old initiative likely faces the same pitfalls as previous ones, but the problem is not simply an issue of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy. Rather, it reflects an overall deficiency on part of the international community in dealing with the Afghan problem.

IMPLICATIONS: Uzbekistan’s restated initiative goes in parallel with other current international efforts devoted to resolving the Afghan problem. For instance, the Pakistani newspaper “Dawn” recently reported that Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar and her Afghan counterpart Zalmi Rasoul would travel to Saudi Arabia to discuss the kingdom’s possible role in the Afghan reconciliation process. This initiative clearly comes in response to the recent interactions between Saudi officials and representatives of the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami party of former Afghan premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Saudi Arabia has previously been unwilling to get involved in the Afghan peace process unless the Taliban shunned al Qaeda. However, the kingdom has now agreed in principle to act on a joint request from the U.S., Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The “6+3” concept includes neither Afghanistan itself nor Saudi Arabia – one of the key players in the geopolitics surrounding the issue of Afghanistan. Suffice it to mention that Saudi Arabia was one of three states to officially recognize the Taliban as a legitimate government of Afghanistan when it seized and established its power in this country in the mid 1990s.

Meanwhile, since NATO is leaving Afghanistan its inclusion in the “6+3” as a key actor may seem irrelevant. Yet, excluding the UN from a format proposed during a GA session seeks like a short sighted approach.

The role of the UN’s aegis in Uzbekistan’s initiative sounds as if the UN only provides a platform, an umbrella and legitimacy for the “6+3” group but not guidance or powerful leadership. The simple UN aegis of the previous “6+2” could not prevent the 9/11 attacks or Afghanistan’s route towards a new cycle of the civil war in the 1990s. On the contrary, if the UN would take on genuine leadership in the overall Afghan peacemaking and reconstruction process, there would be no need for a “6+3” format since this would imply the recognition of Afghanistan as a global problem rather than a regional one. In this respect, the UN could mobilize international resources and impose its will upon all actors involved in Afghan conflict resolution.

On the other hand, the “6+3” concept conceals a vision that all insurgent groups and conflicting factions in Afghanistan should be dealt with as equal actors together with the government in the peace process; that is the reason why Afghanistan’s central government is not part of the formula. However, such an all-embracing approach toward actors inside Afghanistan contradicts the narrow “contact group” approach with respect to external actors. Interestingly, none of the actors included in the “6+3” scheme, except for the U.S., have so far expressed any reaction, while the U.S. was openly skeptical and reluctant to support it. Official Kabul might officially offer support for the very idea and composition of the contact group because this proposed group would if realized determine its fate in one way or another. Nevertheless, since Uzbekistan’s initiative was presented at the UNGA Session, it is officially registered as a UN diplomatic document, granting it a certain status for serious consideration. This may have been part of Tashkent’s calculation since its previous initiatives advanced from the tribune of the UN were left without attention.

Other than the Uzbekistan's occasional initiatives, Central Asian States have come up with very few concrete proposals for resolving the Afghan problem. It is interesting to note in this context that at the UNGA's 65th Session, Turkmenistan's President Berdimuhammedov advanced a proposal to hold an international high-level meeting on confidence building in Afghanistan and development of efficient institutions of state power, under UN auspices. He stated his readiness to discuss the organization of such a meeting with Afghan partners, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, other specialized UN structures involved in the Afghanistan issue and all interested parties. That initiative is also left unrealized.

CONCLUSIONS: Tashkent's recent diplomatic message at the UN contains both important recommendations and uncertainty regarding international cooperation on Afghanistan. The six countries neighboring Afghanistan should undoubtedly work to

coordinate their strategies towards Afghanistan. But it remains unclear why this group should be complemented by only three other parties. Given the fact that the long lasting Afghan conflict is not only an internal affair of that country but also a consequence of destructive and sophisticated geopolitics of the past, the very notion of Afghanistan's neighborhood should be perceived in a broader, not merely geographical but also geopolitical perspective, recognizing that actors like India and Saudi Arabia are also interested parties in Afghanistan. Therefore, Uzbekistan's initiative could be reformulated as "6+X," where the large unknown variable "X" is of crucial significance. At the same time, whatever the value of this magic figure, UN leadership in the Afghan peacemaking process is of fundamental importance.

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FIELD REPORTS

NEW GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT CONFIRMED, ANNOUNCES PROGRAM

Eka Janashia

On October 25, Georgia's parliament approved Bidzina Ivanishvili as prime minister with 88 votes against 54. On the same ballot, parliament passed the government's new composition and its program, envisaging comprehensive shifts in key policy areas that involve constitutional and structural changes.

The first section of the program declares that recently amended parts of the constitution must be reverted in order to establish a correct model of governance and eschew the possibility of an autocratic regime. Georgia's aspiration to integrate with the European Union and NATO remain foreign policy priorities. However, the program also says that Georgia will attempt to start a dialogue with Russia through international mechanisms, in an effort to elaborate a strategy to overcome the existing crisis between two countries. Public diplomacy, economic and joint business projects, and encouragement of people-to-people contacts with Abkhazians and Ossetians are conceived as means for conflict resolution. The program says that the country's economic policy will follow the universal principles of free market economies and will rest upon a model of sustainable development. To bolster Georgia's global competitiveness, the economy should be structurally modernized through encouragement of export and import substitution measures, which is an integral part of modernization, the document reads.

The promotion of agriculture and small and medium enterprises, as well as pension and healthcare reforms will be priorities of the economic and social policies. To this end, fiscal rules will be relieved, production costs minimized, "monopolistic prices" on raw materials slashed and a GEL 1 billion fund for agricultural development created, the document says.

The program also vows that "at the first stage of the [healthcare] reform, all citizens will have the universal basic package of health insurance." The retirement saving system, implying mandatory pension insurance, will operate along with the state-funded system whereas monthly pensions will equal the subsistence minimum. Through the program, the new government also claims to recalculate and lower communal tariffs and remove the current 20% income tax for those whose income is limited to the minimum subsistence level. The document foresees a drawdown in the ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to two Departments of Police and Border Guard and to create an Anti-Corruption Agency as well as a Bureau for Reforms and Development responsible for the long-term development strategy. In addition, a State Security Service, in charge of collecting and analyzing secret information, will be formed and operate independently from the MIA. Consequently, the authoritative Special Operative Department (SOD), dealing with weapons and cargo smuggling, organized

crime, trafficking in drugs and humans, money laundering and extortion; and the Constitutional Security Department (CSD), handling corruption among officials, terrorism-related crimes and threats to the constitutional order, will be abolished. The functions of these departments will be delegated to other structural bodies of the ministry.

Unlike the MIA, The ministry of Defense is not exposed to any significant structural adjustments. The program says that the parliament will keep a close watch on defense spending while the ministry itself will be required to report to the legislative body regularly. The program also envisages the introduction of a military ombudsman liable to supervise the army. The system of conscription will be fully reformed to underpin the base for the reserve service set to be led by the National Guard.

Furthermore, the program envisages preserving the prosecutor's office within the Justice Ministry as an independent enforcement body, headed by a chief prosecutor instead of a minister. Correspondingly, the president will appoint and parliament will approve a chief prosecutor candidate who can be dismissed either through impeachment procedures or a presidential order requiring the parliament's consent.

The program also declares that the judiciary will be freed from state pressure. To this end, the system's institutional and financial independence, as well as the full transparency and publicity of judicial

proceedings will be ensured. The criminal justice system will undergo changes through the imposition of concurrent, instead of consecutive, sentencing. The practice of plea bargaining will be maintained, but in a somewhat modified form "to make it fairer," the program says.

During a parliamentary hearing the day before the approval of a new cabinet and the program, Ivanishvili was asked by the parliamentary minority – United National Movement (UNM) – how much it would cost the government to implement the projects outlined in the program.

Ivanishvili could specify neither the amount of money needed in order to carry out the program, nor the date when the implementation of the different projects are set to start. He said that he was not aware of state budget details but in case the budget proves insufficient to fully cover the program costs, Ivanishvili plans to complement deficits through his personal funds.

"We are probably the first country in the world where the [incoming] PM says that he is not aware of the [resources available in the] state budget and that he will finance healthcare and agriculture with his own money," said Giorgi Gabashvili, a UNM lawmaker. Giorgi Baramidze, another UNM representative and the former state minister for Euro-Atlantic integration, criticized Ivanishvili for not mentioning "a single word that Georgia's territories are occupied" in the program.

KAZAKHSTAN SEEKS TO DIVERSIFY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS

Georgiy Voloshin

In late October, Kazakhstan's recently appointed Minister of Economic

Development and Trade Yerbolat Dossayev informed the country's Parliament that the

Kazakh economy was expected to grow by 5.4 percent in 2012, which is 0.6 percent lower than the previous forecast. According to the minister, the unfavorable situation on world commodities markets had led to the weakening of demand for Kazakhstan's energy exports and encouraged the Government to temper its optimism. At the same time, Kazakhstan's southern neighbor, Uzbekistan, was credited with a 7.5 percent economic growth rate by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development whose July 2012 forecast had been reconsidered in favor of better expectations. In this context, the continuous inflow of foreign direct investment to Kazakhstan is decidedly not sufficient to offset the currently observed slowdown of its economic and industrial development as well as the country's unabated dependence on raw materials.

While the deterioration of economic conditions presents a potential risk to Kazakhstan's domestic stability, its political leadership has multiplied official visits abroad in a search for diversified commercial partnerships and new promising market opportunities. Following his trips to Russia and Turkey, President Nazarbayev was received by the Austrian President Heinz Fischer on the steps of the Hofburg Palace in Vienna on October 22. Currently, Austria is Kazakhstan's seventh largest trade partner, after Italy, the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland in the European Economic Area. Last year, the Kazakh-Austrian bilateral trade turnover amounted to US\$ 4 billion. The total volume of Austrian direct investments into the Kazakh economy has exceeded US\$ 2.5 billion since 1995, which is almost 1.5 percent of the overall FDI for that period. As for Kazakhstan's standing vis-à-vis Austria, it is ranked third among CIS countries, mostly due to the intensity of its energy exports. In 2011, Kazakhstan exported almost 37 percent of Austria's oil consumption.

During Nazarbayev's visit, the two countries signed 19 contracts worth US\$ 220 million, including 10 investment agreements. Kazakhstan's national oil and gas company KazMunaiGaz agreed to partner with OMV Petrom SA in the joint exploration of several mineral deposits on Kazakh territory. Additional cooperation projects were officially adopted in such sectors as construction, machinery manufacturing, and tourism. The two presidents participated in the launching ceremony of the Kazakhstan-Austria Business Council whose main responsibility will consist in the promotion of commercially significant cross border economic interests. Moreover, Nazarbayev and Fischer witnessed the signing of a sectoral agreement concerning international road transportation, which is aimed to increase volumes of trade between Kazakhstan and the European Union as well as on the bilateral level. While the two countries jointly registered 3,000 tons of cargo shipments in 2009, this figure was equal to 4,700 tons one year later and almost 8,000 tons last year. On October 23, Nazarbayev paid his first official visit to Prague, where he was greeted by Czech President Vaclav Klaus. In 2011, the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and the Czech Republic amounted to US\$ 800 million, which according to Nazarbayev was far from reflecting the full potential of the two countries' economic cooperation. While Nazarbayev and Klaus pledged to increase this volume up to US\$ 1 billion in the near future, the Kazakh-Czech business forum made possible the conclusion of contracts worth US\$ 250 million. Two of them concern the sector of pharmaceuticals, where Czech companies are especially well placed to share technological expertise with Kazakhstan-based partners. For instance, Prague's Favea Europe committed itself to building modern pharmaceutical factories in Northern and

Eastern Kazakhstan whose cost was estimated at around US\$ 50 million.

At the same time, Kazakhstan's new Prime Minister Serik Akhmetov visited Germany on a working visit. While in Berlin, Akhmetov met with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle. He also had talks with the chairman of the German Industrial Association Ulrich Grillo on the issue of large scale industrial projects jointly implemented by Kazakhstan and Germany. Between January and August 2012, the Kazakh-German bilateral trade turnover exceeded US\$ 2.5 billion, which is 8.7 percent higher than one year before. More than half of German imports from Kazakhstan is constituted by ferrous alloys (52.1 percent) followed by

hydrocarbons (18.3 percent) and silver (7.8 percent). Furthermore, Kazakhstan is in the top three suppliers of oil products to the German economy. While Austria and the Czech Republic may boast of only 100 and 76 joint-ventures with Kazakhstan respectively, the Kazakh-German economic cooperation is based upon the wide-ranging activities of almost 1,200 enterprises. During Nazarbayev's February 2012 visit to Berlin, the two countries signed a partnership agreement related to the extracting, industrial, and technological sectors. Thus, although Kazakhstan is already party to the Customs Union with Russia and Belarus, it stills looks for closer contacts with its primary European clients.

AZERBAIJAN'S PRESIDENT SLAMS BP OVER OIL OUTPUT

Mina Muradova

The leadership of British Petroleum (BP) in the international consortium developing the largest oil field in the Caspian Sea faces strong criticism from Azerbaijan's government for a fall in crude oil output which has created a US\$ 8 billion hole in state revenues. Azerbaijan's economy is strongly dependent on energy exports and falls in production have a significant impact on the country's growth as well as the mood of voters ahead of the 2013 presidential elections. President Ilham Aliyev has blamed the international consortium AIOC for "grave errors," resulting in a sharp reduction of oil output in the off-shore fields "Azeri" and "Chirag" over recent years. The head of state admitted that every field has its own life and that after peaking, the oil production goes down. However, "this is not the question ...

the matter is that the given forecasts are not being implemented."

At the latest governmental discussion of the country's macroeconomic indicators for January-September 2012, President Aliyev reiterated the signature in 1994 of the so-called Contract of Century for exploration of the offshore oil fields "Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli" (ACG). BP holds 35.83 percent of the shares, while Azerbaijan's State Oil Company holds 11.6 percent, Chevron 11.27 percent, Inpex 10.96 percent, Statoil 8.56 percent, Exxon 8 percent, TPAO 6.75 percent, Itocu 4.3 percent, and Hess 2.72 percent. Hess has sold its share to India's ONGC. President Aliyev noted that 75 percent of the oil profit was originally received by foreign companies due to their large investments in the fields' development, while the remaining 25 percent was a profit for Azerbaijan. The

sides became equal partners only when foreign companies returned their investment. Since mid-2008, taking into consideration the economic feasibility of two fields Azeri and Chirag, the sharing scheme started to change and now 75 percent of the oil profits belong to Azerbaijan. While appreciating the huge foreign investments, Aliyev said that the ACG development was not “a charitable event ... this is a business project ... The consortium has invested US \$28.7 billion into the development of these fields, but it has derived an income of US\$ 73 billion.”

The ACG has experienced declining output over the last three years. According to Aliyev, it produced 40.3 million tons of oil in 2009 against BP's forecast of 46.8 million tons. In 2010, the forecast was cut to 42.1 million tons while production came in at 40.6 million tons. Last year the fields' production level dropped to 36 million tons, which was still down from the expected 40.2 million tons.

At the current output level, Aliyev predicted that BP would have produced only 33 million tons by the end of the year, against the forecasted 35.6 million tons. Aliyev argued that at an oil market price at US\$ 100 per barrel, while higher in reality, the failure to meet output forecasts – termed a “grave error” on the part of BP – has cost Azerbaijan US\$ 8.1 billion in revenues over the last three years. “ ... Wrong forecasts given to us are not accepted. False promises to SOCAR are not accepted ... serious changes are needed,” Aliyev stressed. He also noted that the company recognized its mistakes one month ago and promised to take measures, including the replacement of personnel responsible for errors and ensuring that oil output is kept at a stable level. According to the president, BP has done nothing to repair the damage: “Investors who are not able to implement their commitments ... should learn a lesson and take serious steps; measures should and will be taken.”

Industry and Energy Minister Natiq Aliyev termed the drop in production at ACG over recent years “abnormal. At an energy conference in Baku he stated that “We see large numbers that are significantly different from those planned, which means either that the project was conceived improperly or that activities carried out to stabilize oil production are insufficient.” Yet, the minister also reassured foreign investors that there is “no threat of termination of contracts with foreign oil companies in Azerbaijan.” Clarifying the president's words about taking serious measures, the minister said that “measures must be taken to stabilize oil production on the ACG field.”

In addition, Natiq Aliyev stated that SOCAR, which also has a share in the project, should strengthen its control over the annual production program. “New oil wells are needed because old wells have a limited life period ... New methods of exploration are needed,” the minister said.

A few days after the president's statement, BP appointed new experts to help run its oil production operations in Azerbaijan after the departure of two vice-presidents earlier this week. Jim Cowie will take up the position of Vice President for Wells Azerbaijan starting from November 15, and will lead the team of wells experts in Baku. Craig Wiggs has been appointed Vice President of Operations Midstream in the country. BP also reported that 10 new specialist engineers will join the wells team in Baku, drawn from its operations in several other parts of the world, including North America, the North Sea, Angola and Egypt.

On October 17, SOCAR's president Rovnag Adbullayev met the BP group's chief executive Bob Dudley in London to discuss the future of the ACG oilfield. The statement said the parties agreed to continue working closely together to manage oil production from the ACG fields in the Caspian Sea for

the benefit of the State of Azerbaijan and its partners.

“It was an open and constructive meeting and the task ahead is clear. BP is fully committed to Azerbaijan and the effective management

of the ACG field complex, one of the world's great oilfields,” Dudley was quoted as saying. BP will resume output at the Deepwater Guneshli platform this month after closing it on Sept. 25 for planned maintenance.

CSTO CONDUCTS EXERCISES IN ARMENIA

Haroutiun Khachatryan

The exercises of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Rapid reaction Forces (RRF) in Armenia may be a milestone for the organization's international recognition. The war games demonstrated that the CSTO has grown into a Russia-led military bloc, which is capable of anti-terror operations on the territories of its member countries as well as abroad.

From September 15 to 19, 2012, the CSTO RRF military exercises took place in the Bagramian testing ground not far from Yerevan, Armenia. Although scarcely advertised officially, the exercises marked a new stage in the CSTO's development. The organization was established as a military bloc centered on Russia, intended to replace the Soviet Union as one of the modern world's centers of military power. However, it currently has only six members. In addition to Russia, the CSTO comprises of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Armenia.

The motivations for participation vary among the members. For Russia, the CSTO is a means for retaining its former military importance in the former Soviet countries and beyond, and Russia has consequently been the member most interested in deepened cooperation. Armenia, in turn, uses the CSTO as an additional tool to train its military forces. In particular, during the latest CSTO war games a large quantity of Armenian heavy weaponry and vehicles, and Armenia-made drones, were used. The recent

war games in Armenia were not only the largest ones conducted by the CSTO since 2010. They were also the first exercise where all members of this bloc participated. Founded on the basis of a document signed in 1992, the organization's original purpose was to conduct different peacekeeping operations on the territories of its member states, for which exercises were held near Astana, Kazakhstan, in October 2012. The CSTO was to protect its member states against external aggression but would abstain from intervening in their internal affairs. This was the principal reason why the CSTO did not interfere in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. The CSTO was registered with the United Nations in 1995.

A new stage of development started when the CSTO members decided to form the RRF in February 2009. These forces were to combat terrorism and to prevent technical catastrophes. The RRF is expected to be based on Russian territory, although according to Russian officials, their principal objective will be to counter the dangers CSTO members face in Central Asia due to the situation in Afghanistan and in Pakistan.

Most RRF exercises have been hosted by the smaller CSTO members, implying an interest among these states in the continued development of the forces. It has been reported that the RRF will eventually comprise about 15,000 troops, of which Russia will provide one airborne division and one airborne assault brigade. Kazakhstan will

provide another brigade and the remaining CSTO members will provide one battalion each. At the initial stage of the RRF's formation, the force will comprise of only one battalion from each of the seven members, which are intended to have a joint command and undergo joint training. In 2009, then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said these troops must present "a serious force," be equipped with the most modern equipment and have a military potential on par with that of NATO forces. The formation of the RRF has not yet been completed, although its command has formally been appointed.

Three military exercises have been held since the decision to form the RRF, with the participation of all six CSTO members: Kobalt 2010 comprising of training for internal troops in Kazakhstan; Vzaimodeisvie 2010 in Russia for military troops; and the 2012 exercises in Armenia. In addition, the RRF has conducted several bilateral exercises, primarily in Central Asia. The exercise in Armenia, comprising nearly two thousand participants, was the first in

which both military and civilian personnel (police, emergency ministries etc) of the member countries were engaged. In addition, the International Red Cross Organization took part. The exercise was conducted according to an anti-terror scenario, which was considered important especially in the perspective of emerging threats to the Central Asian members and even more so given the existence of a nuclear power plant in Armenia. Yet, certain details of the scenario were related also to the situation in Syria and Libya.

According to analysts, the exercises were more important for Russia than for Armenia as they proved the capability of CSTO forces to provide a broader response to a terrorism scenario. In particular, the CSTO's Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha emphasized that parts of the CSTO RRF are already used in operations in Central Asia. In sum, while the CSTO develops slowly and remains far less effective than its counterpart NATO, it is increasingly gaining recognition as an anti-terror organization in its own right

NEWS DIGEST

AFGHAN TROOPS HURT IN CAR BOMB AT NATO-AFGHAN PAKTIA BASE

17 October

At least 45 Afghan troops have been injured by a suicide car bomb attack at an Afghan-Nato military outpost in eastern Paktia province, say officials. The attacker reportedly detonated a vehicle packed with explosives close to gates at the Zurmat base. Deputy provincial governor Abdul Rahman Mangal said most of the injured soldiers had been hit by broken glass. Foreign forces are due to withdraw from Afghanistan by 2014, which has sparked fears of a surge in violence. Militants have increasingly been targeting members of the Afghan police and military as they take over security operations. Nato said the combat outpost was attacked by "insurgents using a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device". No casualties were reported among the Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf). Provincial government spokesman Rohullah Samon told the Associated Press news agency the bomb appeared to have gone off before the driver reached the camp's gates. He said most of the wounded soldiers had been in rooms hit by the force of the explosion, which shattered windows up to 3km (2 miles) away. Isaf spokesman Maj Adam Wojack said mortar fire was directed at the base after the bombing. But he denied a claim by Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid that insurgents had managed to break into the base. (BBC)

TALIBAN THREAT WORRIES PAKISTAN MEDIA

17 October

Pakistan's media have expressed alarm at Taliban threats to target journalists after critical coverage of the shooting of Malala Yousufzai. The 14-year-old education campaigner was seriously wounded as she returned home from school in the Swat valley. The Pakistani Taliban said it had shot her for "promoting secularism". The All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS) said Taliban threats directed at the media were aimed at curbing the freedom of the press. Officials say the threats were uncovered in an intercepted phone call from a Pakistani Taliban leader. In the call, intercepted by Pakistan's intelligence agencies, Hakeemullah

Mehsud, chief of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), reportedly gave his subordinate "special directions" to attack the media in cities including Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi and the capital Islamabad. The APNS said the Taliban was trying to "browbeat the voice of the people". The Pakistan Press Foundation said religious scholars who publicly denounced the shooting had also been alerted by the government. It said the government was taking the TTP threat seriously. The BBC says it has "taken appropriate steps to protect its staff and operations in Pakistan" following the threats to media organisations. "We are monitoring the situation and will take any necessary action to protect our staff. We continue to broadcast to Pakistan," a BBC statement said. The attack on Malala, in which two other schoolgirls were wounded, was overwhelmingly condemned in Pakistan. Groups that have previously expressed some sympathy for the Taliban's cause largely denounced the targeting of children. The strength of reaction has put pressure on the government to take more action to tackle the insurgency. Pakistani media quoted Taliban sources as saying they were angered by the level of attention that the attempted murder had received and felt the coverage was biased. Malala was flown to the UK on Monday for specialist treatment at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham. A spokesman described her condition as stable and said she was responding well to treatment. He added that reports about Malala's family visiting her in hospital were wrong. "We can clarify that currently the family are still in Pakistan," the spokesman said. The teenager is widely known as a campaigner for girls' education in Pakistan. In early 2009 she wrote an anonymous diary for BBC Urdu about life under the Taliban, who, after taking over the Swat valley in 2007, banned all girls from attending school. Officials in her province have issued a 10m rupee (\$105,000; £66,000) reward for information leading to the arrest of the gunmen, while Interior Minister Rehman Malik has offered a \$1m reward for the capture of Taliban spokesman Ehsanullah Eshan. Pakistan was named as the deadliest country for journalists in 2011 for a second year running, by campaign group

Reporters Without Borders, which said that 10 journalists had been killed. (BBC)

TURKEY TRIES PIANIST FAZIL SAY FOR INSULTING ISLAM

18 October

World-famous Turkish pianist Fazil Say has appeared in court in Istanbul charged with inciting hatred and insulting the values of Muslims. He is being prosecuted over tweets he wrote mocking Muslims, in a case which has rekindled concern about religious influence in the country. Mr Say, who denies the charges, said recently he was "amazed" at having to appear before judges. Rejecting an acquittal call, the court adjourned the case until 18 February. Prosecutors brought the charges against Mr Say in June. He faces a maximum sentence of 18 months in prison although correspondents say any sentence is likely to be suspended. The indictment against him cites some of his tweets from April, including one where he says: "I am not sure if you have also realised it, but if there's a louse, a non-entity, a lowlife, a thief or a fool, it's always an Islamist." Dozens of the pianist's supporters gathered outside the courthouse with banners, one of which called on the ruling Islamist-based AK Party to "leave the artists alone". Mr Say has played with the New York Philharmonic, the Berlin Symphony Orchestra and others, and has served as a cultural ambassador for the EU. Egemen Bagis, Turkey's minister in charge of relations with the EU, suggested the case against him should be dismissed, saying the court should regard his tweets as being within "his right to babble". However, Mr Bagis also criticised the pianist for "insulting people's faith and values". (BBC)

RUSSIA SUCCESSFULLY TESTS INTERCONTINENTAL MISSILE

19 October

The Russian Defense Ministry says that an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) has been successfully test-fired from Russia's northwestern military testing ground in Plesetsk and hit a target in the northeastern Kamchatka Peninsula. According to the officials, the test-fire's goal was to check technical characteristics of the Topol RS-12M intercontinental ballistic missile, whose validity period has been prolonged from an initial 10 years to up to 24 years. Ministry officials say that in future the validity of Topol missiles could be prolonged to up to 25 years. The three-stage, solid-propellant Topol missiles, known in the West as SS-25 Sickle, were deployed in the Soviet

Union in mid-1970s and remain the main missiles of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces. (RFE/RL)

RIVALS DISPUTE UNITED RUSSIA'S ELECTION VICTORY IN NORTH OSSETIA

21 October

The leadership of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party (ER) convened on October 18 to assess the results of the elections four days earlier to the legislatures of six federation subjects, including the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. North Ossetia was the only region where ER garnered a substantially lower share of the vote than during the December 2011 elections to the Russian State Duma. Even so, United Russia's two main rivals in North Ossetia, Patriots of Russia (PR) and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), have both rejected the preliminary election results as falsified. According to those preliminary results, United Russia polled 46.2 percent of the vote (compared with 67.9 percent in December) while Patriots of Russia got 26.5 percent, compared with 0.35 percent in the State Duma ballot. The KPRF, which has traditionally placed second in North Ossetia, was relegated to third place with 10.5 percent of voters' preferences. At present, United Russia has 38 of the total 70 mandates, PR has 12, with the KPRF and A Just Russia – receiving four apiece. (By contrast, in nearby Krasnodar Krai, United Russia won 95 of the 100 mandates.) One self-nominated non-partisan candidate won in a single mandate constituency. Run-offs are scheduled for October 28 in 11 more of the 35 single-mandate constituencies. With a total of 17 parties participating, the average number of candidates in single-mandate constituencies was 8-9, and in some it was as high as 11. Between 1,000 and 2,000 PR supporters staged a protest in Vladikavkaz on October 16. They adopted a formal appeal to the republic's Central Election Commission not to tabulate the results until all complaints of malpractice have been investigated. Former State Duma deputy Arsen Fadzeyev, elected with 56.5 percent of the vote in a single-mandate constituency, claimed PR "won a convincing victory," which he said the republic's authorities "are trying to steal from us." Commentators and senior ER functionaries are unanimous in attributing PR's impressive showing in North Ossetia primarily to Fadzeyev, the former two-time Olympic freestyle wrestling gold medalist and five-time world champion who also headed the PR party list. Fadzeyev, 50, is a classic

example of the larger-than-life local hero who managed to parlay prowess as a wrestler into political influence in his home republic. (Others include Eduard Kokoity, former de facto president of Georgia's breakaway Republic of South Ossetia, and Sagid Murtazaliyev, the ex-head of Daghestan's Kizlyar Raion, who is now in charge of the Daghestan subsidiary of the Federal Pension Fund.) In 1999, Fadzayev was appointed as deputy head of the North Caucasus directorate of the Federal Tax Police and elected as a member of the North Ossetian parliament. He was subsequently elected twice to the Russian State Duma, in 2003 for the Union of Rightist Forces (SPS) and in 2007 for United Russia. Fadzayev formally quit United Russia four months ago, saying that, in recent years, the party had begun to distance itself from the people, and people's problems, and had thus discredited itself "irrevocably." Nonetheless, it is possible that he had decided to quit earlier, given the strained relations between himself and Republic of North Ossetia head Taymuraz Mamsurov. Fadzayev had reportedly assumed he would again head United Russia's list of candidates in last December's State Duma elections, but Mamsurov insisted on heading the list himself, with Fadzayev placed fifth, thereby guaranteeing he would not be re-elected. It was only due to a high voter turnout (85 percent) that North Ossetia ended up with no fewer than four State Duma deputies (two from ER and two from the KPRF) compared with just one (Fadzayev) in the previous two parliaments. Just a few weeks after the Duma election, Fadzayev hinted that he would participate in the parliamentary election this fall, and in the 2015 election for republic head when Mamsurov's second term expires. Mamsurov and Fadzayev also don't see eye to eye on Russian policy toward South Ossetia. As a State Duma deputy, Fadzayev argued eloquently in August 2008 in favor of Moscow formally recognizing the breakaway region as an independent sovereign state. Mamsurov, by contrast, makes no secret of his hopes that South Ossetia will one day be united with North Ossetia as part of the Russian Federation, although he concedes this may not happen in his lifetime. (He is 58.) North Ossetian Prime Minister Sergei Takoyev admitted last week that ER had not anticipated that rival parties would campaign "so aggressively." Neither Takoyev nor any other senior republican official has said so openly, but PR's 26 percent share of the vote might well have been even higher if voter turnout had not been so low (just 43.8 percent). With a few exceptions, such as Chechnya, voter turnout is generally lower across Russia for

republic-level polls than for national elections, as many disaffected voters are convinced that republic-level parliaments have no powers to bring about positive change, and therefore stay at home on polling day. In that respect, it will be interesting to see whether the unprecedentedly high vote for PR will motivate voters in North Ossetia to turn out in significantly larger numbers in the run-off and cast their ballots for that party. The first priority of North Ossetia's new parliament will be to adopt in the second reading a long-term (until 2025) strategic socioeconomic development program intended to modernize and render more effective the region's largely agriculture-based economy, raise living standards, and reduce the chronic unemployment that drives many young men to seek work elsewhere in the Russian Federation. (The unemployment problem reflects a shortage of skilled labor. A recently modernized furniture plant has just hired 14 specialist craftsmen from India.) Fadzayev's chances of winning the 2015 ballot to find Mamsurov's successor will hinge partly on the effectiveness of that development program over the next 2 1/2 years, and partly on whether ER can field a rival candidate of comparable stature and charisma to run against him.

RUSSIA CONDUCTS LARGE SECURITY OPERATION IN NORTH CAUCASUS

21 October

Russia's National Counterterrorism Committee (NAK) says that a large operation in the North Caucasus involving forces from the Federal Security Service and Interior Ministry has resulted in 49 militants and bandits being killed, including nine whom the committee called "odious" leaders of militant and outlaw groups. The NAK reported on October 21 that the operations were carried out in Kabardino-Balkaria and Daghestan. According to the NAK, four militant leaders were among those killed in Kabardino-Balkaria. It identified them by the names Batyrbekov, Ulbashev, Karkayev, and Tutov. At least two separate operations were conducted in Daghestan, also leading to the deaths of several men who have been described as militant commanders. The NAK said that 30 people were arrested and 20 voluntarily surrendered to authorities in Daghestan. It added that 219 "wanted" people had been taken into custody. The security operation has already resulted in the seizure of some 30 improvised explosive devices, more than 100 kilograms of

material used for making explosives, more than 100 weapons, and some 530 mines, rockets, and grenades as well as a large amount of ammunition. The NAK did not provide any time frame for the security operation. News of the security sweep comes just days after Russian President Vladimir Putin applauded security and law enforcement agencies for reportedly eliminating more than 300 militants in recent months but also called on those agencies to increase their efforts to wipe out remaining groups of militants and outlaws in the North Caucasus. Putin referred to several international events scheduled to be held in Russia, such as the Winter Olympic Games in 2014 and the soccer World Cup in 2018, and said, "It is a matter of honor for all law enforcement officials to ensure that these events are staged in a normal, business-like, and festive manner, so that nothing can cast a pall over them." Violence has been increasing in Russia's North Caucasus in recent years. While Chechnya, long associated with Islamic militants, has seen a drop in incidents under Kremlin-picked strongman Ramzan Kadyrov, neighboring republics such as Kabardino-Balkaria, Dagestan, and Ingushetia have experienced an increase in violence, which has included assassinations of officials and attacks on military convoys. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIAN ANTI-PUTIN ACTIVIST 'ADMITS RIOT PLOT'

23 October

Russian investigators say a detained anti-Kremlin activist has admitted trying to foment riots with funding from a Georgian MP. Leonid Razvozhayev disappeared in the Ukrainian capital Kiev on Friday, after meeting officials at the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, a UN official said. Fellow opposition activists say he was kidnapped by Russian agents. Russia's Investigative Committee (SK) says Mr Razvozhayev turned himself in and confessed to Russian police. He is an aide to Russian opposition MP Ilya Ponomarev and an ally of leftist opposition activists Sergei Udaltsov and Konstantin Lebedev. Last week the SK - a Russian police body modelled on the American FBI - confined Mr Udaltsov to Moscow after questioning him about an alleged plot to seize power in Russia. A recent documentary on Russia's NTV channel, which is seen as close to the Kremlin, showed what it said was footage of Mr Udaltsov meeting officials from Georgia to discuss mounting a coup in Russia. The SK said it had begun an investigation into Mr Udaltsov, Mr Razvozhayev, Mr Lebedev and others on the

basis of the allegations made in the documentary, Anatomy Of A Protest II. In its latest statement, the SK says an arrest warrant was issued for Mr Razvozhayev on 18 October. On Sunday he turned himself in to the SK and said he wanted to make a confession, the statement added. He will soon be charged with attempting to foment riots, it said. "In it he gave details of the preparations by him, Sergei Udaltsov, Konstantin Lebedev and other individuals for organising mass unrest in the Russian Federation, and also about those named individuals' involvement in the public disorder that took place on 6 May 2012, on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow," the SK statement said. "According to Razvozhayev's confession, [Georgian MP] Givi Targamadze financed this unrest." A spokeswoman at the UNHCR in Kiev, Alexandra Makovskaya, told the BBC that Mr Razvozhayev had come to the UNHCR's office on Friday to request asylum. He had stepped outside during a break in the discussions and disappeared, she said. A video published on the LifeNews.ru website showed a man - apparently Mr Razvozhayev - being escorted by police and shouting to reporters: "Tell everyone that they tortured me. For two days. They smuggled me in from Ukraine." (BBC)

TURKMEN LEADER VOWS TO RAISE SALARIES, PENSIONS

23 October

The president of Turkmenistan has pledged to raise salaries and pensions and transform the country from an agrarian nation into an industrial one. President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov told a 2,500-strong audience of elders, ministers, and regional delegates in Turkmenbashi on the Caspian coast that salaries would be raised by 10 percent and pensions by 15 percent starting from next year. He said he would use the country's gas wealth to push up living standards. Turkmenistan will celebrate the 21st anniversary of its independence from the Soviet Union on October 27. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts Turkmenistan will enjoy real GDP growth of about 8 percent in 2012-13, after a strong 14.7 percent rise in 2011 on the back of bigger gas exports to China and increased public investment. (RFE/RL)

CANADIAN FIRM DISCOVERS OIL FIELD IN NORTH AFGHANISTAN

24 October

A spokesman for Afghanistan's Mining Ministry, Jawad Omer, has told RFE/RL that the Canadian company Terraseis has located a large oil field in the northwestern part of the country. "This area

is situated between the Khan Charbagh and Aqeena border districts, where technical research has been conducted," Omer said. The site is in Faryab Province, near the border with Turkmenistan. Omer said more exploration would be done to get an accurate assessment of the size of the oil field. The news comes as the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) started commercial production at an oil field in the neighboring Sar-e Pol Province on October 22. Mining Minister Wahidullah Shahrani called it a "historic" day for his country, "that for the first time the process of commercial production of crude oil has started in Afghanistan." The CNPC is initially expected to produce nearly 2,000 barrels of oil per day at the Amu Darya site in Sar-e Pol Province but plans for a drastic increase in volume as more wells are opened. The CNPC signed contracts to develop oil and natural-gas fields in northern Afghanistan in December 2011. The CNPC contract also calls for construction of Afghanistan's first oil refinery. China is already developing a gas field across the border in Turkmenistan and has provided loans to the Turkmen government to develop the massive South Yolotan-Osman gas field in southern Turkmenistan. The South Yolotan-Osman field is one of the world's largest, with conservative estimates claiming there are some 4 trillion cubic meters of gas there and some other estimates saying the field has more than 14 trillion cubic meters. There is speculation that the field extends across the border into Afghanistan. At a June summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Beijing, Afghan President Hamid Karzai also lent his support to plans for a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan to China. Afghan gas could be included in the pipeline. The news of the oil discovery in Faryab and start of production in Sar-e Pol has Afghan officials talking about energy self-sufficiency for the country. Northwest Afghanistan is believed to hold vast deposits of oil and natural gas. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA'S LOWER HOUSE VOTES TO BROADEN HIGH TREASON LAWS

24 October

Russia's parliament has voted to widen the definition of high treason in a move critics say is a further attempt to stifle dissent in the country. Under the proposed new law, high treason and espionage will include supporting "those seeking to damage Russia's security". Those illegally obtaining secret state information could face an extended prison sentence. The bill is expected to

be swiftly passed by parliament's upper house. The legislation, which was voted through the Duma 375 votes to two, will then need to be signed into law by President Vladimir Putin.

Commentators noted that the bill was originally conceived under Mr Putin's previous presidency, but was not pushed through by President Dmitry Medvedev. "The current Duma vote can be seen as a symbol of the restoration of Putin's power" said the centrist daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. Current law describes high treason as espionage or other assistance to a foreign state damaging Russia's external security. The new bill expands that definition to include moves against Russia's "constitutional order, sovereignty and territorial and state integrity". In addition, the proposal adds multinational organisations to a list of groups that could benefit from state secrets. Human rights campaigners have said that this could mean that sharing information with international organisations such as Amnesty International or even lodging an appeal with the European Court of Human Rights could become a criminal act. The law "places a Damocles sword above virtually every citizen who talks to a foreigner for work, or even as part of a harmless day-to-day meeting," said Konstantin Rivkin, a lawyer, quoted by *gazeta.ru*. Alexander Cherkasov, an activist at the rights group Memorial, said the law had been designed for "arbitrary interpretation". "The adoption of this law is a continuation of the present feverishly prohibitive legislative trend," said Ella Pamfilova, former head of the Presidential Human Rights Council, in *gazeta.ru*. Last month, the government ordered USAID to halt its activities in the country, accusing the US government aid agency of attempting to influence domestic politics. USAID had funded several Russian non-governmental organisations, including those engaged in election monitoring. (BBC)

PARLIAMENT VOTE ON NEW GEORGIA CABINET

25 October

Georgia's parliament is expected Thursday to vote to confirm Bidzina Ivanishvili as prime minister at the head of a new government. Approval of the cabinet is virtually certain, as Ivanishvili's formerly opposition Georgian Dream bloc won a majority of 85 seats in the 150-member parliament in the October 1 elections. Ivanishvili, a billionaire businessman, on Wednesday told the parliament in Kutaisi that he plans to quit politics in just 18 months and become a member of civil society. Ivanishvili has pledged to continue President

Mikheil Saakashvili's pro-Western foreign policy, including pursuing European Union and NATO membership. But he has also promised to improve relations with neighboring Russia, which fought a brief war with Georgia in 2008 over the Georgian separatist-led territory of South Ossetia. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN, AZERBAIJANI FOREIGN MINISTERS TO MEET IN FRANCE

25 October

The Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers are scheduled to meet in France on October 27 to discuss the issue of the breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The announcement was made by the Armenian Foreign Ministry on October 25. It said the meeting between Armenia's Edward Nalbandian and Azerbaijan's Elmar Mammadyarov will be mediated by the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. Nalbandian and Mammadyarov last met in Paris in June. Ties between Armenia and Azerbaijan worsened after Azerbaijan's president pardoned a soldier who had been sentenced to life in prison in Hungary for murdering an Armenian soldier. Armenia and Azerbaijan have been in conflict for more than two decades over Nagorno-Karabakh, which has a majority Armenian population. A fragile ceasefire has been in place since 1994. (RFE/RL)

AFGHANISTAN MOSQUE SUICIDE BOMB ATTACK KILLS AT LEAST 37

26 October

A suicide bomber targeted worshippers who had gathered at a mosque in north Afghanistan for prayers to mark Eid al-Adha, killing at least 37 people. More than 30 people were wounded in the attack, which happened as people were leaving the mosque in Maymana, capital of Faryab province. Senior provincial government officials were also attending the prayers. The victims were mainly civilians and police officers. Senior officials appeared to escape serious injury. "We had just finished Eid al-Adha prayers and we were congratulating and hugging each other," deputy provincial governor Abdul Satar Barez told the AFP news agency. "Suddenly a big explosion took place and the area was full of dust and smoke and body parts of police and civilians were all over the place. It was a very powerful explosion." He said the provincial police chief, Abdul Khaliq Aqsai was wounded, but it was not clear if he had been the target. The BBC's Bilal Sarwary in Kabul says that security had been very tight around the mosque, and questions will now be asked as to how the attacker managed to get past at least four

security checkpoints. Mr Barez said the attacker had been wearing a police uniform. Attacks in northern Afghanistan are far less common than in the south and east, and Faryab province has been considered to be relatively peaceful. However, there have been a spate of assassinations in Maymana in recent days, our correspondent says. A senior former Taliban commander, who had defected to the government side, was killed along with son, as well as a number of very prominent tribal elders seen to be giving crucial support to the government. (BBC)

TBILISI SAYS NO DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH RUSSIA WHILE IT OCCUPIES GEORGIAN TERRITORY

26 October

Georgia's new foreign minister, Maia Panjikidze, has reiterated to journalists her government's position that it will continue a policy of refraining from formal diplomatic relations with Moscow until Russia ends its "occupation" of two breakaway Georgian regions. The incoming government led by Georgian Dream leader Bidzina Ivanishvili was confirmed by lawmakers on October 25. Critics and political rivals have sought to paint Ivanishvili, a billionaire who made much of his fortune in Russia, as overly cozy with Moscow. He has vowed to improve relations crippled since a five-day war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 over two breakaway Georgian regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. "Twenty percent of Georgian territory is occupied by Russia, and Russia is the country that is occupying Georgia," Foreign Minister Panjikidze said on October 26. "It opened two embassies in Tskhinvali and Sukhumi, and as long as what I have said remains a fact, diplomatic relations with Russia will not be restored. Despite the fact that we don't have diplomatic relations, it's possible to have a dialogue, just as the former government was able to work with Russia in different spheres." Following the 2008 war, Moscow recognized the independence of the separatist-led South Ossetia and Abkhazia. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIAN POLICE DETAIN OPPOSITION LEADERS AT MOSCOW RALLY

27 October

Russian police have detained three opposition leaders during an unauthorized demonstration in the center of Moscow. Correspondents on the scene reported that policemen surrounded Aleksei Navalny and Ilya Yashin on Pokrovka Street and

forced them into a police vehicle. Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov reported earlier on his Twitter account that he also had been detained. "What are these people doing? They are not holding any placards, they just approached Udaltsov," Udaltsov's lawyer Violeta Volkova told Reuters after Udaltsov was detained. "Is it prohibited? Do we have a law prohibiting more than three people to gather? I think that he [Udaltsov] was detained illegally." Moscow police say that all three detained leaders will face administrative charges for violating public order. The opposition rally by some 200 people on October 27 was in support of arrested activists including Leonid Razvozhayev, who claims to have been kidnapped from Ukraine and forcibly brought to a Moscow jail earlier this week. The rally began near the headquarters of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), where protesters displayed banners declaring, "I am against torture and repression." The protesters then spread out, apparently trying to make use of a Russian law that says a person can protest alone without any permission from the authorities. The banners carried by the protesters referred to Razvozhayev's claim he was tortured after he was abducted by unidentified men in Kyiv, where he was applying to the UN for asylum. Razvozhayev told human rights leaders who visited him in detention in Moscow that he was forced by his abductors to sign a confession that he had plotted mass riots. His lawyer says he has since disavowed his confession. Investigators earlier this week said that Razvozhayev had turned himself into police in Moscow and confessed voluntarily. Razvozhayev, along with Udaltsov and Udaltsov's assistant Konstantin Lebedev, were charged this month with plotting mass riots after a documentary aired on a pro-Kremlin television channel claimed the trio want to overthrow President Vladimir Putin. Meanwhile, members of a number of Ukrainian nongovernmental organizations on October 27 picketed the building of the Ukrainian Security Service in Kyiv. The demonstrators demanded that the circumstances of Razvozhayev's departure from Ukraine be clarified. They also demanded that the chiefs of the Security Service and the Border Service be suspended until the country's leadership explains what happened. In other news, Russian billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, who finished third in Russia's presidential election in March, said he's leaving business to focus full-time on politics. The 47-year-old Prokhorov, believed to be worth about \$13 billion, told reporters at a congress of his Civil Platform party in Moscow that he has signed a trust agreement under which the partners of his

investment group ONEXIM will manage his assets. He said that he wanted to lead "a third power" in Russia that will compete both with the Kremlin and the opposition. Prokhorov competed in Russia's presidential election amid speculation that his candidacy was orchestrated by the Kremlin, a charge he denied. His return to politics comes after he has remained silent during the past five months of the Kremlin's crackdown on the opposition. (RFE/RL)

WTO READY TO APPROVE TAJIKISTAN'S MEMBERSHIP

29 October

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has announced that it would likely approve Tajikistan's bid to join the WTO this December. The WTO said on October 29 that "all members" are expected to approve the documents that Tajikistan's working group submitted for entry. The decision is expected during a meeting of the WTO's General Council on December 11-12. Tajikistan vowed to undertake a series of commitments designed to meet all WTO regulations. Tajikistan has been attempting to join the WTO since 2001. If Tajikistan meets all the criteria and WTO members approve the country's entry, Tajikistan should become a full member of the organization in 2013. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA, SERBIA SIGN FINAL AGREEMENT ON SOUTH STREAM PIPELINE

29 October

Russia's state-owned gas giant Gazprom and Serbia have signed the final investment agreement on the South Stream gas pipeline. Gazprom announced the October 29 signing with its partner in Serbia – Srbijagas -- in a statement on the Russian company's website. Srbijagas director-general Dusan Bajatovic said the deal clears the way for the construction of the pipeline to start on Serbian territory. Bajatovic said Serbia should earn some 200 million euros annually from the project. South Stream aims to bring some 63 billion cubic meters of Russian gas across the Black Sea into Europe.

TAJIK, UZBEK LEADERS HOLD RARE PHONE TALK

29 October

Tajikistan's presidential press service says President Emomali Rahmon called his Uzbek counterpart, Islam Karimov, on October 29 to mark the 20th anniversary of Tajik-Uzbek

diplomatic ties. The leaders exchanged congratulations by telephone, expressing hopes "to bring the bilateral ties on a higher level." The call is noteworthy since the two presidents barely communicate with each other. Dushanbe-Tashkent relations remain strained due to disputes over water and energy resources and transit routes. Uzbekistan openly opposes Tajikistan's project to complete the Roghun hydropower plant, saying that the project will leave Uzbekistan without water. Tashkent has been cutting electricity and natural gas supplies and closing road and railway connections between the two countries. (RFE/RL)

NEW PROSECUTOR-GENERAL TO INVESTIGATE EX-PRIME MINISTER'S DEATH

30 October

Georgia's new prosecutor-general is vowing to start investigating high-profile cases, including the death of Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania in February 2005. Archil Kbilashvili's appointment was confirmed on October 29 by President Mikheil Saakashvili. Zhvania died from what officials claimed was carbon monoxide poisoning due to an inadequately ventilated gas heater. However, Zhvania's relatives question the official version of his death. Zhvania's brother Georgy says his brother was assassinated by Georgia's leadership. Georgy Zhvania is a member of the new parliament. He is part of Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition that defeated ruling United National Movement party in Parliamentary elections on October 1. (RFE/RL)

