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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday, April 23, 2003

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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/April 23, 2003

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* (www.cacianalyst.org) and described below.

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Analytical Articles:

Analytical articles require a three to four sentence introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples.

Analytical article structure:

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

BACKGROUND: 200-300 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: 200-300 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.

Specifications for Field Reports:

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 500-700 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: svante.cornell@pcr.uu.se and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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NGOS - UNLIKELY TARGETS OF AZERBAIJAN'S AND GEORGIA'S WARS ON TERRORISM

Claude Zullo

The governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia are benefiting from the international war on terrorism as a means of holding on to power. Azerbaijan recently passed a new law that will make it even more difficult for independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to operate. Meanwhile, Georgia is attempting to introduce a bill that could drastically undercut its vibrant civil society groups. Persistent vigilance is needed on the part of local NGOs and the international community in order to protect civil society groups in both countries and their fledgling democratic institutions.

BACKGROUND: During the past year, NGOs have been a target of the international war on terrorism in Azerbaijan and Georgian because of the watchdog role they play in these fledgling democracies. In 2001, during a series of high-profile court hearings in Azerbaijan over one environmental NGO's attempt to register, the Chief of the State Registration Department of the Ministry of Justice, Fazil Mamedov, noted that all NGO applications would be checked for possible connections with international terrorist organizations. In April 2002, Georgian President Shevardnadze argued in a speech that international terrorists might be supporting Georgian NGOs. Both governments have sought to implement NGO laws that are in different ways reminiscent of President Lukashenko's policies toward NGOs in Belarus.

For years, Azerbaijani NGOs have faced a number of government roadblocks. According to an analysis conducted by the International Center for Nonprofit Law (ICNL), the Azerbaijani NGO Law, which was passed in October 2000, leaves critical issues unresolved, one of these being registration. As a result, the Azerbaijan-based Legal Education Society noted that NGOs experience endless delays in registration process and that registration requests are often rejected based on unclear or irrelevant reasons. The inability of independent NGOs to register has complicated their operations and their ability to partner with donors and international institutions. As if the October 2000 NGO law was not enough, the Azerbaijani parliament subsequently passed new legislation in early 2002, the Grants Law of Azerbaijan, which would have required organizations receiving grants to register each grant with the central government before the funding could be used. Fortunately, a coalition of Azerbaijani NGOs and international groups were able to convince Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev to veto the legislation. However, only months later, in December 2002, the new Law on Grants was adopted, which not only requires all organizations that give and receive grants to notify authorities of these grants, but also requires recipient organizations to pay 27 percent of their employees wage in to a social insurance and pension fund.

In Georgia, after initially supporting their work, President Eduard Shevardnadze has becoming increasingly suspect of civic groups. On the eve of a visit to the United States in

September 2001, President Shevardnadze called for closer government control over NGO grants and reportedly even raised the issue with Secretary of State Powell. Soon thereafter, the government circulated the draft Law on Charity, Grants, and Humanitarian Assistance, which eventually morphed into the draft Law on Grants and Humanitarian Assistance. The latter draft law would have cancelled the existing law and established state control over the utilization of grants. NGOs and reform-minded parliamentarians managed to scuttle passage of the law; however, a little over a year later, the Ministry of State Security circulated a new draft law entitled, "On the Suspension of Activities, Liquidation, and Banning of Extremist Organizations and Organizations under Foreign Control." The new law, if passed, would suspend, liquidate, or ban any organization under direct or indirect foreign control, including receiving funding, that "aimed at damaging the interests of Georgia." The draft law does not define the "interests of Georgia" nor does it establish criteria for a definition. Moreover, the draft law states that court decisions to suspend or terminate an organization's activities can be appealed "based on Georgian legislation," however, no legislation currently exists that would allow an appeal. If the court decision is revoked, the draft law provides for the state to compensate for damages, but sets out no procedure for doing so.

IMPLICATIONS: In a country with a weak legislature, weak opposition political parties, and a judiciary beholden to the executive branch, Azerbaijan's NGOs are one of the few collective institutions that to some extent stand against governmental abuse of power. Thus the passage of the restrictive NGO law in Azerbaijan may undermine the country's already faltering democratic development. In Georgia, governmental institutions are more robust in comparison to its neighbor to the East, but NGOs also play a critical watchdog role. Passage of the Ministry of State Security's proposed NGO law would not only undermine civic groups, but would also open new avenues for even greater levels of corruption in a society that is already overwhelmed by kleptocratic practices. Still, the effects of increasingly restrictive NGO laws in Azerbaijan and Georgia are not limited to the borders of these two small countries of the Caucasus. As with the Belarusian example, other

autocratic rulers in the region may be emboldened to take similar steps in countries throughout Eurasia.

CONCLUSIONS: If one of the main goals of the war on terrorism is to eliminate conditions that promote terrorist activities, then Azerbaijan and Georgia's attempts to undermine NGOs through legislative restrictions is at odds with this goal. Indeed, by undermining independent civic groups, both countries' governments will stifle constitutionally sanctioned outlets for free speech and transparency. This can only fuel extremist tendencies in the long run. In both Azerbaijan and Georgia, NGOs have demonstrated an ability to mobilize themselves to advocate against restrictive legislation. There is no reason to believe that they cannot succeed again, but as with previous efforts, the international community has to assume a key, albeit behind-the-scenes role in pressuring both governments to withdraw or amend legislation.

In addition, NGOs in Azerbaijan and Georgia can take preventive steps that can help them stay one step ahead of

similar future moves by their respective governments. More effective legislative watch programs need to be instituted, so that NGOs will not be caught off guard by debilitating legislation, and perhaps even be able to impact its content before it is put to a vote. The creation of NGO law centers that assist non-profit organizations in understanding the law and potential legal issues, and that can help NGOs to navigate through the registration process would also be helpful. Finally, NGOs need to improve their ability to communicate their mission, goals, and activities to the general public. Unfortunately, in many these societies, the general public does not understand or appreciate this role and often looks at NGOs as they do other private and public institutions, with a jaundiced eye.

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THE FIRST KYRGYZ OMBUDSMAN IS TO OVERTHROW LOCAL OFFICIALS

The Kyrgyz ombudsman Tursunbay Bakir uulu will be able to decrease facts of human rights violation, but not significantly. So thinks a plurality (44 percent) of the local population, as shown by results of interviews held by the Public Opinion And Prognosis Research Center with UNDP support. Somewhat fewer, 35 percents, believed the new rights protector can be very successful. Only 11 percent are convinced he is going to change nothing. However, almost all the responders say the institute of ombudsman is necessary for Kyrgyzstan.

Some local observers doubt that Tursunbay Bakir uulu is powerful enough to realize his ambitious ideas. Law granted him access to any documents, even those top secret, and to cabinets of state officials, including the President, the right to participate in governmental meetings, etc. But that's it. All the ombudsman can do is to send petitions and recommendations to the "White House". And officials are able to decline the statements, if they consider the arguments not strong enough.

The position of the Kyrgyz ombudsman is supposed to be politically neutral. "My position makes me a mediator between power, opposition, and people," said Tursunbay Bakir uulu, "And I will not be tolerant to those who violate citizens' rights, whether it be officials or their political opponents." As a parliamentary deputy, he was rather a centrist politician who supported neither the government, nor its opponents. His devotion was more to religion than to politics. This presents him as an objective, fair, and honest person in people's mind.

Analysis of letters addressed to the ombudsman showed that 70 percents of them are complaints regarding court decisions and actions of representatives of law enforcement. Bakir uulu states that he is about to conduct investigations, and send his assistants to observe court processes. The ombudsman promises, in his annual reports, to reveal specific names and structures exposed in violating the freedom of citizens. On this basis, the President and the Parliament are to make special decrees. Bakir uulu says he will send his reports to the General Procurator. The ombudsman hopes many of the public officials who violated citizens' rights will be removed from power and punished by law.

First of all, Tursunbay Bakir uulu intends to solve the problem of human rights violations in penitentiary and military institutions. He sent President Askar Akaev a proposal to establish the position of psychologists in jails. After this, the first Kyrgyz ombudsman plans to put order to the situation in hospitals and for pensioners. Soon, donors willing, his organization will publish brochures on citizens' legal rights and distribute free of charge among the population.

Meanwhile, the ombudsman cares for himself, too. He brought a lawsuit under the Criminal Code against Olga Bezbodrova, editor in chief of the local "Vecherny Bishkek" newspaper, and Daniyar Karimov, political reporter, who published an article on the possible connection of Bakir uulu with illegal Islamic organizations. Asked how this lawsuit goes with his statement of freedom of the press in the country, the ombudsman says, "Is there anyone to call me an

effective rights protector, when I am unable to defend those of my own?"

The human rights protector thinks his job might be not too effective because of scarce finance. Annually, the government will allot about 86,000 dollars to the institute of ombudsman. Bakir uulu finds this sum insufficient to solve the human rights problems in the country. Hence he hopes for cash from international organizations. The ombudsman especially relies on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that, most likely, is going to support many of his projects. In particular, Bakir uulu plans, with financial aid from UNDP, to send his employees abroad to attend special courses, and to invite foreign specialists to Kyrgyzstan. By the way, the ombudsman, due to UNDP's sponsoring help, has already traveled to Poland, Russia, Georgia, and Ukraine to benefit from the experience of foreign colleagues.

"There is a good deal of things for me to do in Kyrgyzstan," said Bakir uulu as he came back full of impressions. Nothing has been done yet, but the first Kyrgyz ombudsman is making detailed plans of work for the future. Citizens, both the government and opposition hope he will be the one to change the human rights situation in the country. Will the ombudsman justify the confidence of society?

Aijan Baltabaeva

THE RUSSIAN AIR FORCE IN KYRGYZSTAN: THE MILITARY IMPLICATIONS

William D. O'Malley & Roger N. McDermott

In June 2002, Kyrgyz Defense Minister Esen Topoyev announced that Kant airbase would be made available for CIS Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF), apparently signaling the intention of the Kyrgyz government to re-enter the fold and reorienting its security needs toward Moscow. This demonstrated that Bishkek looks for multiple security partners, including the West, to support its own fragile security. By November, components of the VVS began arriving at Kant, and further air movements soon followed this high profile deployment, with three Su-27 fighters from Lipetsk, two Su-25 attack planes from Dushanbe and two Il-76 military cargo planes constituting the total Russian deployment at Kant.

BACKGROUND: Since the U.S. deployment into Kyrgyzstan's only international airport at Manas in 2001 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, the choice of location for the CRDF airbase was limited to a series of less capable regional or military airfields. The airfield at Kant was a former Soviet flight-training base for foreign pilots, and is ideally situated 20 km east of Bishkek, away from densely populated areas. Kant was one of the deployment airfields offered to the US in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. An Air Force Survey Team inspected Kant along with other proposed sites, preferring Manas. The Team reportedly found that Kant, which was designed to support training operations and use by light aircraft, was in poor condition and did not meet the U.S. military's specific operational needs or safety standards. When the base is fully operational for the CRDF in 2003, plans are to station a combined aviation group with more than 20 Russian aircraft and 700 servicemen and civilian personnel there. It is estimated that the cost of maintaining the airbase at Kant will reach \$50 million per annum. The Russian and Kyrgyz governments are expected to conclude an agreement in May 2003 on permanent basing of the CRDF aviation group. Topoyev defined the aviation group's dual mission as partly a united air-defense system, which includes Su-27 aircraft, and partly to support land forces. These are army aviation Su-25s attack fighters. Since the Kyrgyz air force is comparatively weak and its personnel poorly trained, the majority of the aviation group's operational assets will consist of VVS fighters and transport planes.

Russia's Su-27 fighter, like the US F-15, is designed for gaining air supremacy and supporting air operations. It can operate up to 1,600 km from its base, allowing it to be stationed further from the target and crisis zone than other CRDF aircraft. The Kyrgyz have no comparable aircraft and it likely would protect Bishkek from aerial attack, intercepting separate targets in Kyrgyz and Tajik airspace and escorting cargo or passenger planes. In Chechnya, the Su-27 is more frequently used to attack ground targets with special and precision munitions and would likely perform a similar role with the CRDF.

Like the U.S. A-10, Russia's Su-25 was specifically designed as a ground attack aircraft, getting its first combat exposure in Afghanistan. The lessons from operations against the Mujahideen as well as the Chechens resulted in many improvements in both the aircraft and how it's employed. Soviet and Russian air forces found that it is ideal for direct troop support because of its relatively low-speed (subsonic), armored underbelly, weapons mix and load, and day/night capabilities. It is highly maneuverable and able to attack when there is limited space over the target. The Su-25 appears to be well suited to attack targets in the rugged and mountainous parts of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The IL-76 and An-26 transport aircraft are designed for moving troops and delivering weapons and supplies and will carry out theatre and tactical transportation duties, with the Mi-8 handling most of the tactical transportation, medevac and search and rescue operations. The Mi-8 can also be used effectively to enhance ground force mobility and supply battlefield firepower, or as a forward air controller platform, providing final targeting instructions to attacking aircraft.

IMPLICATIONS: An assessment of the aviation group's antiterrorist function must be based upon what the respective governments believe its purpose to be as well as Russia's operational and tactical use of airpower in a similar operational context, i.e., Afghanistan and Chechnya. The Russian government views the aviation group as a lifeline for the CRDF, providing essential support for ground forces in combat operations against groups of international or regional terrorists. Politically it is intended to strengthen bilateral ties between Russia and Kyrgyzstan, promote stability through the Collective Security Treaty, demonstrate Russia's proactive military role in combating the region's terrorist threat, and reinvigorate Russia's security links with Central Asian Republics.

However, in the Chechen conflicts, the Russian military has used airpower without achieving a convincing demonstration of its utility against insurgents. Airpower has a predominantly supporting role to play in antiterrorist operations and as demonstrated by US forces in Afghanistan, it is most effective when used in concert with ground troops that concentrate enemy forces, provide clear target data/ID, and

vector in the air. Terrorist tactics can also influence the decision on whether the use of airpower is appropriate, as witnessed during the Batken campaign in 1999; militants were avoiding being brought to battle and timing their operations to coincide with poor weather conditions or nightfall.

The Mi-24, used so frequently in the Chechen conflict, is notably absent from the planned deployment to Kant and the close air support/ground attack mission is assigned exclusively to fixed-wing aircraft. It may reflect an assessment that the Su-25 is the preferred platform, or an unwillingness to permanently deploy these helicopters to Bishkek, as they can easily be added if needed.

CONCLUSION: The Kyrgyz armed forces believe that the aviation group now provides them with much needed dedicated combat aviation assets, increased combat capabilities and directly commits Russia to the antiterrorist mission. The Kyrgyz air force also hopes that it provides them with a base from which to improve the quality of its pilots, the readiness and effectiveness of its existing platforms and the future modernization of the service. In this complex and slowly evolving security environment, Bishkek

will seek to maximize all foreign military assistance in its multifarious efforts to acquire genuine security. If Kyrgyzstan is to develop and strengthen the antiterrorist capabilities of its armed forces, it will require real investment in the training and combat readiness of its Special Forces and the improvement of its air force. Whilst the deployment of the VVS seems crafted to promote Moscow's regional security interests, encouraging Bishkek to rely upon military help from Russia and through CIS regional bodies, the prospect of enhancing security through the Kyrgyz themselves appears more distant.

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TURKMENISTAN: HISTORIC PACT SIGNED WITH RUSSIA

Turkmen president Saparmurad Niyazov paid an official two days visit to Moscow from the 10th to 11th of April 2003. During the visit, he signed agreements on security cooperation, exporting Turkmen gas to Russia, and canceled a dual citizenship deal between Russia and Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan, being one of the world's most energy-rich countries, with an estimated fourth place in world natural gas reserves. According to estimates, Turkmenistan's gas reserves are over 22 trillion cubic meters. The agreement signed between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkmenistan's leader Saparmurad Niyazov states that Russia will purchase about 2 trillion cubic meters of Turkmen gas within twenty-five years at the price of \$44 per thousand cubic meters. According to President Niyazov, this bilateral agreement will bring \$200 billion of income to Turkmenistan whereas Russia will gain \$300 billion. However, Mr. Niyazov agreed that Russia would pay half of the fee for gas in cash and the rest would be compensated with Russian goods. Turkmen authorities believe that this new gas project is still profitable for Turkmenistan since Russia is both a big market and a transit for Turkmen gas to European markets. Although gas projects are developing with neighboring countries, the climate for operations of international

corporations within the country appears to be less than attractive. For example, Dutch Shell Oil Company is intending to close down its office in Ashgabat, whereas Exxon Mobil shut down its operations in 2001.

In addition, presidents Putin and Niyazov agreed to cancel a 1993 dual citizenship agreement between the two countries. As *Turmenistan.ru* reports, the Protocol about terminating dual citizenship has already been published in the press of Turkmenistan. During the meeting in the Kremlin, this decision was taken as a part of measures of fighting against those who would commit crimes within Turkmenistan by having a dual citizenship. Turkmen authorities believe that this bilateral agreement will prevent acts of terrorism in Turkmenistan. However, annulling this treaty of dual citizenship is creating an uneasy situation among the ethnic Russians in Turkmenistan. Now these Russians need to get a visa and an official permission from Turkmen authorities to visit their relatives in Russia. Russian journalist Arkady Dubnov claims that "many people are flocking to Russia's embassy in Ashgabat for advice on which country they should choose to belong to". Moreover, as journalist Dmitri Glumskov asserts, portraits of Vladimir Putin were burned down on the streets of Ashgabat

at night right after the cancellation of the dual citizenship treaty. Meanwhile, last week the United Nations Committee for Human Rights passed a resolution on Turkmenistan accusing it "of arbitrary detentions and arrests, and harassment and forced displacement of family members of those accused of the assassination attempt last November", states a Turkmenistan Project report. Turkmen authorities are also asking Russia to extradite opposition members or 'suspected militants'. In this light, the warming of ties between Niyazov and Putin and the cancellation of the dual citizenship treaty can be seen as a real setback for the Turkmen opposition in Moscow, including the former head of the Central Bank of Turkmenistan, Khudayberdy Orazov, and former Turkmenistani ambassador to Turkey, Nurmukhamed Khanamov.

All in all, the bilateral gas deal is scheduled to bring benefits both to Turkmenistan and to Russia. However, dissolving the treaty of dual citizenship and signing a security agreement appears to have negative implications for ethnic minorities within Turkmenistan, and for the exiled Turkmen opposition.

Chemen Durdiyeva

GEORGIA SETS ITS SIGHTS ON NATO

Eric A. Miller

Georgia's unwavering support for U.S. efforts in Iraq has contributed to Tbilisi's image as Washington's chief strategic partner in the Caucasus. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze is capitalizing on this cooperation to facilitate and expedite Georgian membership into NATO. Goodwill alone, however, will prove insufficient to earn a place in NATO. The Georgian government must tackle a number of military matters to meet NATO standards. Some positive results on these measures are emerging, but for membership to become a reality, Tbilisi must overcome political and economic challenges as well as military development issues.

BACKGROUND: Through its strong backing of U.S. efforts to oust Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, Georgia has solidified its image as Washington's chief strategic partner in the Caucasus. On March 21 the Georgian parliament ratified a long-awaited military agreement with the United States, establishing a framework within which U.S. military advisors will work in Georgia. Georgia invited U.S. experts to examine military bases to determine whether American planes could use the facilities to carry out missions against Iraq. Georgia has also permitted U.S. U-2 spy planes to fly within its airspace of late.

Tbilisi's unwavering support of the U.S. campaign in Iraq is understandable. Georgia views strategic cooperation with the United States and membership in NATO as essential to overcoming its own current security dilemma, and Georgia's desire to move toward Euro-Atlantic institutions is beyond question. Moreover, on March 24 Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze intimated that after the Iraq operation, the United States would step up its role in the settlement of the elusive Abkhaz problem and help expedite Moscow's stubborn refusal to withdraw from Soviet-era bases in Batumi, Gudauta and Akhalkalaki.

Georgia has finally started to take baby steps in NATO's direction. In September 2002 the Georgian parliament passed a resolution that led to the creation of the "State Program of Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia," a plan for how Tbilisi intends to solicit membership in the Euro-Atlantic community. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) formally established a NATO Integration Department to assess military measures necessary for membership. And after 11 years of independence, Georgia has at last begun formulating a National Security Concept.

During a meeting with Georgian Foreign Minister Irakly Menagarishvili on March 14, NATO Secretary General Lord George Robertson welcomed the establishment of Georgia's Coordination Council for Integration into Euro-Atlantic Structures, and stated that NATO would provide the maximum assistance to Georgia in its bid to join the alliance. Georgian leaders have met with NATO officials before, most recently in February, but never at such a high level. Two events scheduled for late April or early May - the opening of the NATO regional office in Georgia and a visit by Lord Robertson - contribute to Tbilisi's optimism.

IMPLICATIONS: Georgia's most daunting problems afflict society as a whole, namely widespread crime, corruption, flawed elections, and poverty. While these questions will undoubtedly impact potential NATO accession, military matters are more "solvable" per se - provided sufficient political will exists to carry them out.

Lack of funds continues to plague Georgia's military development. Parliament doubled defense spending in 2003 over 2002 levels, but allocation problems still exist. Two months into 2003, the Ministry of Defense had still received only 46 percent of the funds budgeted for that period.

The Georgian military is also undergoing what Irakly Batiashvili, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security, describes as "optimization and civilianization." Optimization involves streamlining the military and downsizing its top-heavy military ranks. Georgia's armed forces have 30 general officer positions. Andro Barnoff, Chief of Staff on the Committee on Defense and Security, noted that pending legislation would reorganize the military force structure and reduce its numbers from 20,000 troops to 16,000 by 2003, and to 13,000 by 2004. This legislation, while positive, may generate other problems, such as greater unemployment. MoD proposals, such as offering retiring officers 10-month salary bonuses or providing titles to plots of farmland, are intended to entice officer retirement.

The Georgian government supports the civilianization of the MoD. While this is a difficult transition, Georgian Defense Minister Davit Tevzadze is considering a number of reorganization measures to facilitate the process. The MoD is committed to having a civilian defense minister by 2004 as well as a civilianized Office of the MoD, similar in ways to Washington's Office of the Secretary of Defense. Of course, the transition will be challenging, but the Georgian government is firmly behind this process.

The two-year, \$64 million U.S.-funded Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), designed to enhance the counterterrorism capabilities of Georgia's military and its preparedness to NATO standards, holds promise, but real problems remain on the ground. The recently graduated Commando Battalion, now assigned to the Georgian 11th Brigade at Vaziani military base, focuses primarily on platoon and company-level training, but plans for battalion or brigade strength exercises, integrating artillery and air mobile operations, are still lacking. Without such exercises, Georgian forces will be limited to small operations. Moreover, the MoD has not clearly identified a plausible plan to sustain GTEP forces once U.S. trainers leave. That is, plans to carry on a schedule of training exercises, maintain existing facilities, and ensure pay for GTEP troops are not fully realized.

Beyond this, Tbilisi must focus on selling the country's candidacy to NATO, rather than focusing narrowly on how Georgia benefits from membership. Geopolitical considerations may be paramount, but Georgia must also develop some unique, specialized "niche"

capabilities, a sort of "comparative advantage" new members must provide to complement the larger alliance structure. One plan suggests that Georgian forces will participate in international peacekeeping efforts. A Georgian peacekeeping platoon has been operating in Kosovo within a Turkish battalion since 1999, and Germany recently started training Georgian peacekeepers to serve within a German brigade. The Latvian MoD also offered to train Georgian divers, or "frogmen," necessary for any modern Navy. Another proposal calls on the MoD to establish a regional language institute to teach English to military personnel from the Caucasus and Central Asia, highlighting the importance of language skills for NATO interoperability. Furthermore, Georgia is currently exploring ways to support the rebuilding of Iraq.

Western collaboration in the initial construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Shah Deniz gas pipeline demonstrate rising U.S. economic interests in Georgia. Three attacks in January 2003 on energy transportation networks in Georgia, however, suggest

that pipeline security is insufficient. The pipeline will require Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Turkish security cooperation. Georgia could take the lead with a tripartite anti-terrorism center in Tbilisi, thus further developing its military and creating another niche capability.

CONCLUSIONS: Shevardnadze is capitalizing on the war on terrorism and the U.S. campaign against Iraq to achieve NATO membership, but Georgian goodwill alone will prove insufficient to earn a place in NATO. The initial steps are important, but Georgia's progress remains tenuous. Its inability, or unwillingness, to crack down on issues like corruption and election fraud could render them moot. For membership to become a reality, Tbilisi must overcome political and economic challenges as well as military development issues.

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STREAMLINING SOCIAL SECURITY IN KAZAKHSTAN

In spite of much cited macroeconomic success stories, public welfare in Kazakhstan has been largely ignored in the past decade. Although the country can boast the highest standard of living in Central Asia, for a nation that cherishes ambitions to join the WTO the mark is set higher. Kazakhstan is taking bold steps to increase pension and salaries.

In a recent televised annual message to the nation, president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev outlined, in general terms, social security measures to be implemented in coming months. In his words, the present level of economic development provides a solid basis for an increase of minimum pension from the current 5000 tenge (\$33) to 5500 tenge (\$36), while the average pension is expected to increase to 8000 tenge (\$53). It was announced, in the same breath, that the minimum of salary will rise by 32% to 6600 tenge (\$44) in the year 2004.

Even critics of social reforms were obviously baffled by the announced program to protect the most vulnerable section of the population. Strictly speaking, the planned increase of the pension is barely enough to catch up with the minimal subsistence level of 5211 tenge (\$34). But it is the first time in the last decade that the president has declared in his annual address a clear-cut scheme which signals a change from high-sounding macroeconomic preoccupations to the down-to-earth needs of the masses. Probably for this reason, the announced program was accepted by the wider public as a turning point ushering in a new welfare policy.

Kazakhstan lost many years trying to step up social reforms, often patterned on western models, by painful trial and error. In June 1996,

the parliament adopted the first law on non-state pension funds on voluntary basis. The law failed to revive the system, since the impoverished population could not be persuaded into making contributions to funds. According to the director of the Association of Pension Funds, a non-government body, in the years 1996-1997 arrears of pensions to be paid by the state amounted to 4 billion tenge.

The next attempt was the adoption in 1998 of the updated pension law, which was in essence a slightly adapted model of the Chilean system. The retirement age was advanced from 60 to 63 for male, and from 55 to 58 for female. Given the low life expectancy (57 years for male), it would be naïve to believe that many live long enough to get their hard-earned pensions. People of pre-retirement age are a burden both for government offices and private companies. An employee or a qualified worker often does not stand the competition from young and vigorous educated people well versed in computer skills. In these circumstances, an early retirement with low pension is the only option for many people over 55.

On the positive side, the 1998 law stimulated pension fund managers to widen and upgrade their network of services. While the results of the 1996 reform efforts were utterly discouraging, now there are 16 non-state pension funds operating all over Kazakhstan. Their number, as well as the rate of capitalization of funds, is growing. Despite the collapse of some "bubble funds" and cases of duping contributors in the first half of nineties, public confidence has not been seriously eroded. According to the new law,

contributors are free to switch from one fund to another, and it encourages competition among these funds.

The law provides that managers of enterprises and private companies will transfer 10% of their workers' wages to a pension fund. But many employers are reluctant to do so. The existing regulatory mechanisms of the pension system leave a number of loopholes. According to Labor and Public Welfare minister Gulshan Karakusova, out of the total number of 1,690,000 retired people of Kazakhstan, 900,000 receive less than \$40. She believes that the pension system of the country should be revised and the amount of the retirement pension must be strictly pegged to the last active year's income and the years of service of a retiree, which is not the case under the current regulations.

The government is planning to set aside 20 bln. tenge for next year to increase the pension level. An additional 50 bln. tenge is earmarked for salary raises. However, government officials seem to realize well that financial injections alone cannot solve the problem of poverty and unemployment. They encourage local governors to develop further the network of so-called social relief works to employ the jobless in cleaning the streets and parks. Nearly every city in Kazakhstan has one or two doss-houses with a soup-kitchen, a social rehabilitation center. Apparently it will take many years for the well-thought social schemes to be effectively implemented.

Marat Yermukanov

BUS ATTACK HIGHLIGHTS PROBLEMS IN CHINA-KYRGYZSTAN RELATIONS

Michael Dillon

What appeared at first to be a serious but unfortunate accident involving a long distance bus travelling from the Kyrgyzstan capital, Bishkek to China took a more serious turn when it emerged that the passengers and drivers had been shot and killed before the bus caught fire. Diplomatic relations between China and Kyrgyzstan, already tense, were once again thrown into focus.

BACKGROUND: On Thursday, March 27, a long distance passenger bus owned by a travel company from Xinjiang was attacked 60 km outside the town of Kochkorka in the Naryn region of eastern Kyrgyzstan on the road from Bishkek to Torugart. The bus, which was carrying 17 passengers and at least two drivers, was travelling to Kashgar to collect goods for resale in Kyrgyzstan and the passengers were carrying large amounts of cash. The vehicle was discovered by a passing hunter 500 metres off the road in a meadow by the side of a river, and the authorities initially reported the incident as a traffic accident, serious but hardly unusual in a border region where large numbers of often unroadworthy vehicles are driven for long distances across difficult terrain. However, when the bus was examined more closely, it was discovered that the victims were still seated and had apparently been shot and robbed before the bus was set on fire. The fire had also destroyed all their documents and this made identifying the bodies even more problematic. Investigators discovered two possible sources for the outbreak of the fire on the bus and ten cartridges of the type that are fired by a Kalashnikov assault rifle were found at the scene.

The majority of the victims were identified as Chinese citizens, although this may have included ethnic Uyghurs and Kyrgyz in addition to Han Chinese. It was assumed that the passengers had been the victims of bandits as they had been carrying large quantities of money and armed robbery is still seen as the most likely motive, but there was also speculation that they might have been targeted by Uyghur separatists.

China, including the autonomous region of Xinjiang in which Kashgar is situated, is considerably wealthier than its smaller neighbour, and there is a regular transfer of goods westwards across the mountainous passes, often in small lorries and minibuses. The opening of new international bus routes between the Osh region of southern Kyrgyzstan and Kashghar in Xinjiang was formally approved in an order signed by the Kyrgyz Prime Minister, Nikolay Tanayev, on August 6, 2002. This order gave the green light to small passenger vehicles without four-wheel drive to travel across the mountains via the towns of Irkeshtan and Artux.

The Chinese Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Hong Jiuyin met the Kyrgyzstan Deputy Foreign Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zheenbek Kulubayev, on March 29, and was assured that the Kyrgyz authorities were investigating the attack as a matter of

urgency. The seriousness with which the incident is viewed by both sides can be seen from the fact that the signing of an agreement on military cooperation between China and Kyrgyzstan, planned for Friday March 28, was postponed as Ambassador Hong travelled to the crash scene. China's President Hu Jintao personally called for a speedy investigation and on April 1 it was announced that China has sent a team of police officers to assist the Kyrgyz police in the investigations.

IMPLICATIONS: Relations between China and its tiny Central Asian neighbour have been strained for some years. Kyrgyzstan is a poor mountainous state with a population of some 4.5 million and feels threatened both by the economic might of China and by Islamist and separatist movements, primarily in Uzbekistan but also in Xinjiang.

In May 2002 there were demonstrations in the south of Kyrgyzstan against a decision by the lower house of parliament to transfer 95,000 hectares of Kyrgyz territory to China, land that had been the subject of discussion in border negotiations that date back nearly ten years. These demonstrations continued when the bill was finally ratified by the Kyrgyz upper house on May 17 2002 in spite of legal moves to outlaw protests. On May 22, the Kyrgyz government resigned after a special report criticised its handling of demonstrations the previous March during which there had been five deaths in the Dzhahal-Abad region in the southwest of the country. The following day, Kyrgyzstan deported to China two Uyghurs who had been accused of killing an Uyghur leader in Kyrgyzstan in 2000 and subsequently of murdering a member of a Chinese government delegation. Kyrgyzstan alleged that these Uyghurs were members of the Eastern Turkestan Liberation Front, an organisation China considers terrorist.

On June 30, 2002, the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek, Wang Jianping, was shot dead by two men firing handguns. His Chinese driver and a Kyrgyz citizen were killed at the same time. On August 9, two Uyghurs, one a Kyrgyz national and the other a citizen of Turkey, were arrested and extradited to China, accused of being members of the ETLF and of involvement in the murder of the diplomat.

CONCLUSION: The long-term impact of this incident will depend entirely on the identity of the assailants and their motives. If it was a straightforward criminal attack,

cooperation between the Chinese and Kyrgyz police and governments could strengthen relationships between Beijing and Bishkek. This is the view taken by both the Chinese embassy in Bishkek and the Kyrgyz president, Askar Asayev, who is said to be taking a keen personal interest in the investigation.

A political murder by separatists would be more complicated. Kyrgyzstan, like its larger neighbour Kazakhstan is under considerable pressure from China to ensure that it is not used as a base by Uyghur separatists. There is a significant and long-standing Uyghur community in Kyrgyzstan with grievances against the Bishkek government. Uyghur militants forced out of Xinjiang have operated across the border for

some years and many Uyghurs were bitterly disappointed that the newly independent government of Kyrgyzstan did not support their case for an independent Uyghuristan after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. The Kyrgyzstan government is also concerned about the impact of incidents of this type on investment in the country, as investors are already cautious because of the rising crime rate and political instability.

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AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT REAFFIRMS INTENTION TO JOIN NATO

Speaking on April 18 at a meeting with the co-chairman of US-NATO Committee Bruce Jackson, President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev re-affirmed his government's desire and goals to join NATO. Such statements by the head of state have been rare in Azerbaijan, as in the past his political and military advisors have been the ones raking up the issue and making similar proposals.

"We have been doing this work since 1994, but never made much noise about this", said the president, referring to Azerbaijan's efforts to join the alliance. In the past, he seldom addressed this issue personally. In 1999, presidential advisor Vafa Guluzadeh was the first to introduce the idea of inviting NATO military bases into Azerbaijan. Since then, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia have warmed up, prompting many analysts to think that Azerbaijan has put the idea of joining NATO into its backburner. Yet, President Aliyev's remarks come as strong evidence of the country's steady course toward joining the alliance.

Bruce Jackson informed the Azerbaijani President that after the Prague summit of NATO, the focus of the alliance shifted toward the Balkans and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Of the latter, he more specifically pointed out Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan. "If we can draw significant attention to the Caucasus region and start discussions on these countries, we can include these countries into the list of possible candidates for admissions by 2006-2007", said the guest. According to Jackson, Ukraine and Georgia have been coordinating their efforts

to join the alliance, urging Azerbaijan to do the same.

Azerbaijan's relations with NATO began in 1994, when the country joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program. Since then, Azerbaijan has been an active participant of both NATO's military exercises and political summits. The most vivid evidence of Azerbaijan's commitment to NATO was in 1999, when the President of Azerbaijan traveled to the Washington summit of NATO in spite of international pressure on the alliance because of the Kosovo war. Yet out of the three Caucasus republics, Georgia has been perceived by the West as the most eager to join the alliance.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, the cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO has been on the rise further, mostly due to the boost of military cooperation between the U.S. and Azerbaijan. It was made possible thanks to the waiver of section 907 of the Freedom Support Act by the U.S. Congress, allowing direct U.S. assistance to the government of Azerbaijan for the first time since 1992. Azerbaijan also sent peacekeeping troops to Kosovo and Afghanistan as part of its military cooperation with NATO.

At the meeting, President Aliyev mentioned the fact that Azerbaijan has been together with the US on the war against international terror. "You know that we immediately joined the coalition against Iraq. From all this, you can conclude that Azerbaijan has decided to join NATO and join with the US, even at times when other NATO members chose not to", Aliyev said.

Meanwhile, Minister of Defense of Azerbaijan Safar Abiyev is travelling to Washington in May to discuss bilateral military cooperation. The visit will take place at the invitation of U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and will include "many suggestions" that the American side has to offer to Azerbaijan. Abiyev also expressed his view that the issue of Azerbaijan's admission to NATO might also be on the agenda during his visit to the US.

Recent policies of the Azerbaijani government show that the nation's leadership sees the future of the country together with the West and within the western security system. Joining NATO would certainly benefit both sides as it would bring stability and security to the conflict-torn Caucasus region and further integrate the region into European political and economic structures.

This, however, requires much work ahead, including reforms and progress in the field of democratization. This was the message sent to the Azerbaijani leadership by Bruce Jackson. The latter urged the Azerbaijani government to intensify the fight against corruption and the conduct of free and fair elections. President Aliyev in return, said that these works are being done anyway, not depending on the fact whether Azerbaijan will be admitted to NATO or not. "We are building a democratic legal and independent country and what you said will certainly be reflected in Azerbaijan's life," concluded the President.

Fariz Ismailzade

NEWS BITES

ARMENIAN OPPOSITION RALLY PARTICIPANTS CLASH WITH LAW-ENFORCERS

09 April

The participants in a procession organized by the Armenian opposition in Yerevan today clashed with the police. Despite the law-enforcers' efforts to block the central streets of the city, the opposition managed to hold a meeting and a procession aimed to wreck the inauguration of Armenia's President. After the meeting in front of the Institute of Ancient Manuscripts two or three thousand of the action participants made for Republic Square, where the inauguration ceremony was being held at the Government building. The policemen blocked the demonstrators' way. Chairman of the "Republic" party Albert Bazeyan, who topped the ranks, was clubbed by the policemen, which aroused the crowd's indignation, and several women attacked the policemen, hitting them with their umbrellas. The procession ended in a scuffle, and the most "active" of the women were, according to unverified information, taken to the police station. Vice-Chief of Armenia's Police, Major-General Hovhannes Varian persuaded the procession participants to go down Abovian street, promising the Parliament member Arshak Sadoyan that the police would not use force if the demonstrators did not create tension. But the policemen blocked the way near the "Moscow" cinema. After talking to the policemen, who refused to let even parliamentarians go further, the procession participants broke up. The next meeting of the opposition is scheduled for April 15. (Arminfo)

ARMENIAN SCHOLARS FEAR LONG-TERM NEGATIVE IMPACT OF WTO MEMBERSHIP

09 April

Addressing a discussion in Yerevan on 9 April, economist Karine Danielian said membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) will lead to a deterioration in the socioeconomic and ecological situation as domestic products are replaced on the internal market by cheaper foreign imports. Academician Mikhael Gyulkhassian similarly predicted that the imposition of value-added tax (VAT) on agricultural produce beginning in 2009 is likely to lead to the decline of that sector. Armenia was accepted into the WTO in February. (Noyan Tapan)

SHELL CLOSES DOWN IN TURKMENISTAN

10 April

The oil multinational Royal Dutch/Shell Group intends to close its offices in Turkmenistan because the company sees no prospects for taking part in realistic oil-and-gas projects in the country. Reportedly, the staff in the Ashgabat office has already been reduced to two people. Royal Dutch/Shell Group had been interested in taking part in building the Trans-Afghan gas pipeline, but the company has decided the project is "too risky," a staff member was quoted as saying. Shell has been working with the Turkmen government on locating and developing the country's oil-and-gas resources, and headed a consortium to build a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey via Iran. The United States rejected that project, and the trans-Caspian pipeline in which Royal Dutch/Shell Group would have been a participant was never started, at least partly because of Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov's demand

for a down payment of \$1 billion for permission for the project to begin. AFP quoted an official in Shell's Ashgabat office as saying the company would be closing down in Turkmenistan. ExxonMobil closed down its operations in the country in 2001, citing limited prospects for future projects. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN PRESIDENT IS SWORN IN FOR SECOND TERM AS OPPOSITION STAGES NEW PROTEST

10 April

Robert Kocharian was sworn in for a second five-year presidential term at a ceremony on 9 April, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The presidential oath obliges the incumbent to abide by the country's constitution, respect human rights and freedoms, and guarantee the country's freedom and territorial integrity. Opposition lawmakers boycotted the ceremony, as did former President Levon Ter-Petrossian and defeated presidential candidate Stepan Demirchian. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian expressed regret at the opposition deputies' failure to attend the ceremony, commenting that their presence would have helped to demonstrate to the world that "we are a civilized and democratic country," Noyan Tapan reported. In his benediction, Catholicos Garegin II noted that Armenia survived "difficult days" during the election and said, "We still have a path to travel before we achieve full-fledged democracy." Meanwhile, police armed with truncheons, interior ministry troops and regular army troops armed with machine guns clashed on 9 April with thousands of protesters who tried to march on the government building where the inauguration ceremony took place, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Several demonstrators were injured, including Albert Bazeyan, one of the leaders of the opposition Hanrapetutian party, and an unspecified number arrested. After 40 minutes, opposition leaders called on the demonstrators to disperse. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIAN, CHECHEN OFFICIALS CONDEMN EU CHECHEN INITIATIVE

10 April

Russian presidential aide Sergei Yastrzhembskii and Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Dmitrii Rogozin have both made clear their displeasure with the resolution on human rights violations in Chechnya submitted by the EU to the UN Commission on Human Rights on 8 April. Yastrzhembskii told Interfax that the 23 March constitutional referendum in Chechnya has induced "hysteria" among Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe deputies. Rogozin said it is "absolutely unreasonable" for the UN to focus on Chechnya after it refused to debate human rights violations in Iraq. Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov similarly noted that the EU should focus on Iraq and the destruction of monuments there. Kadyrov added that it is inappropriate for EU representatives to formulate resolutions on the human rights situation in Chechnya on the basis of impressions received during visits that last only a couple of days. (Interfax)

RUSSIA, TURKMENISTAN SIGN STRATEGIC GAS AGREEMENT

10 April

President Vladimir Putin and Turkmen President Saparmurat

Niyazov signed a strategic energy accord in Moscow on 10 April under which Turkmenistan will supply natural gas to Russia through 2028. Initially the amount of Turkmen gas that Russia will be able to purchase will be limited by an existing agreement to deliver certain quantities to Ukraine, but when that agreement expires in 2006, Russia will purchase 60 billion-70 billion cubic meters of gas per year from 2007-09, when the quantity will rise to 70 billion-80 billion per year. According to Putin, the price of only half the Turkmen gas will be paid in cash; the rest will be paid in Russian goods. Niyazov told Putin that he expects his country will be able to supply Russia with up to 100 billion cubic meters, starting in 2010. In total, Turkmenistan will supply 2 trillion cubic meters of gas under the agreement for \$300 billion. Gazprom Chairman Aleksei Miller told journalists the figures in the agreement represent only the minimal level of cooperation. Turkmenistan is currently exploiting only one-third of its reserves and the export figures could be increased substantially. (Interfax)

KYRGYZSTAN RECEIVES LAND BACK FROM TAJIKISTAN

11 April

Kyrgyzstan has reclaimed 57,800 hectares of land that was handed to Tajikistan in the 1930s for livestock raising, khabar.kz reported on 11 April. Kyrgyz Vice Prime Minister Bazarbai Mambetov announced the handover after a 10 April meeting with a Tajik delegation headed by his counterpart Hojiakbar Turadzhonzoda. The 3,500 ethnic Kyrgyz who live in the village of Sary-Mogol and who have been using the parcel that has now become part of Kyrgyzstan's Osh Oblast are citizens of Tajikistan, which, according to Mambetov, raises questions about the legal basis of land ownership. The Kyrgyz government adopted a resolution on the return of the parcel in October 2002. Mambetov quoted Turadzhonzoda as saying he hopes the ethnic Kyrgyz living there will adapt to being part of their historic homeland, and he asked the Kyrgyz government not to pressure them to quickly take Kyrgyz citizenship. (khabar.kz)

AZERBAIJAN ENDORSES PAYMENTS TO LANDOWNERS FOR BAKU-CEYHAN OIL PIPELINE

11 April

The Azerbaijani government issued a directive on 10 April to provide financial compensation to individuals living on the route of the proposed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. The compensation is to be issued through local branches of the International Bank of Azerbaijan and will affect more than 4,300 landowners in 13 districts of Azerbaijan and 131 villages. Roughly 150 of the landowners are legal entities, including municipalities, state farms, and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. All of these entities have already received compensation. (Turan)

PUTIN CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL ADMINISTRATION OF IRAQ

11 April

President Vladimir Putin met on 11-12 April with French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in St. Petersburg to discuss Iraq and the impact of the conflict there on other global hotspots, including the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the Korean Peninsula, Russian and Western media reported. During a joint press conference on 11 April, Putin said the fastest way to return Iraq to normalcy would be to administer the country under the aegis of the United Nations. He said that the forces of the U.S.-led coalition have not yet achieved the main goal of the military

operation: locating and securing any weapons of mass destruction that the regime of deposed Iraqi President Hussein might have amassed. "Nobody liked the regime of Saddam Hussein, except Hussein himself...but we cannot export a capitalist, democratic revolution," Putin said. He argued that the best model for stabilizing Iraq is Afghanistan. "There should be an international conference under the aegis of the UN and a temporary national administration should prepare and hold democratic elections designed to return control of the country to the Iraqi people," Putin said. (Interfax)

RUSSIA REFUSES TO SHUT DOWN IRAQI EMBASSY

13 April

Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko announced on 13 April that Russia will not comply with U.S. requests to close down the Iraqi Embassy in Moscow and to expel Iraqi Ambassador to Russia Abbas Khalaf. Russia has had diplomatic relations with Iraq since the 1940s despite a number of regime changes there. Yakovenko said the Iraqi people themselves will decide on the composition of the country's diplomatic representation in Moscow. He added that Moscow does not consider the 6 April incident in which the motorcade of the Russian ambassador to Iraq was caught in crossfire outside Baghdad fully resolved yet. Moscow will seek compensation for material losses and damages in accordance with international law, Yakovenko said. (ITAR-TASS)

RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION INTO KYRGYZ BUS SLAYINGS ANNOUNCED

14 April

The Kyrgyz government commission created to investigate the deaths of 21 bus passengers on the highway to China in late March announced its findings on 14 April. Deputy Prime Minister Kubanychbek Jumaliev told journalists that 18 of the victims were determined to be Chinese citizens, mostly ethnic Uighurs, traveling to Kashgar on business. Their identities were established with the assistance of Chinese DNA experts, a police official told Interfax the same day. Three were citizens of Kyrgyzstan from Djalalabad Oblast. The investigators have determined that the victims had all been shot with a single Kalashnikov rifle and were dead before the bus was set on fire, according to the police official. The official conclusion is that the attack was a case of robbery and had no political motivation. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN OIL, GAS CONDENSATE EXPORTS UP 32% IN JAN., FEB.

14 April

Kazakhstan's exports of oil and gas condensates rose 32% in January and February of this year to 7.73 million metric tons, the State Statistics Agency said Monday. This is equivalent to about 941,000 barrels a day, compared with 716,000 b/d in the same period of 2002. Kazakhstan exported 83% of its output in the two-month period, the agency said. It also said Kazakhstan exported 228,000 tons of oil products in first two months of 2003, more than triple the amount for the same period in 2002. Kazakhstan's revenues from crude oil exports during January and February more than doubled on the year to \$1.2 billion. Revenues from oil product exports rose more than four fold to \$34.9 million, the agency said. Kazakhstan plans to increase oil output by 10% in 2003 to about 52 million tons, slightly more than 1 million b/d. (Dow Jones)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT OBSERVES MILITARY EXERCISES

16 April

Nursultan Nazarbaev on 16 April participated in the concluding phase of the Batys-2003 military exercises that have been under way in western Kazakhstan since mid-March. The exercises were not only the first to be conducted in the western part of the country, but also the largest ever in Kazakhstan. During his stay in the port town of Aqtau, Nazarbaev approved a project to build a military settlement nearby. A motorized infantry brigade and air-defense units are to be stationed there, and construction is to begin in May. Defense Minister Colonel General Mukhtar Altynbaev was quoted as telling Interfax on 15 April that reviews of the experience gained during the U.S.-led military operation in Iraq are being included in the Kazakh exercises. He added that Batys-2003 provided the first opportunity for the Kazakh military to conduct full-scale command-post exercises. Previous exercises were limited to the battalion and platoon levels for financial reasons, he was quoted as saying. But now the country's defense budget -- which was increased to 1 percent of gross domestic product last year -- can cover exercises at the strategic level. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

PUTIN LAUDS PROGRESS ON CREATION OF UNIFIED ECONOMIC ZONE

16 April

President Vladimir Putin said in Moscow on 16 April that he is pleased with the progress made to date on a draft agreement to create a "unified economic zone" encompassing Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Russia. During a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko, who heads the working group on the unification of trade and tariff legislation, Putin said that, "despite a number of setbacks," the group's work is moving forward and the four countries should be able to enter the World Trade Organization as "a single economic space." The other members of the working group -- Ukrainian First Deputy Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister Karim Maksimov, and Belarusian Deputy Prime Minister Andrey Kabyakou -- also attended the meeting with Putin. Analysts believe that the proposal to combine the four countries -- with a total population of 219 million people -- is the most ambitious Kremlin initiative since the collapse of the Soviet Union and could lead to the creation of a new regional entity. (strana.ru)

U.N. REJECTS EU BID TO CENSURE RUSSIA ON CHECHNYA

16 April

The United Nations top human rights body Wednesday rebuffed a bid by the European Union to censure Russia for alleged violations in Chechnya. Russia, which had said the resolution "sent the wrong signal" about the situation in the separatist Caucasus region, comfortably won a vote on the EU motion in the 53-state United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The EU had urged the annual meeting to express "deep concern at the reported ongoing violations ... including forced disappearances, extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, torture, ill-treatment ... as well as alleged violations of international humanitarian law" by Russian forces in Chechnya. But the resolution, which was backed by the United States, was rejected 15-21 with 17 countries abstaining. A similar motion in 2002 failed by a single vote. "The decision to submit such a resolution is regrettable," Russia's envoy Leonid Skotnikov told the commission. It "directly stands in the way of a political settlement (in Chechnya) by sending, to put it mildly, the wrong signal to a small number of its opponents," he said. For Russia, separatist guerrillas, who have been waging a long and bloody campaign against Moscow's rule, are part of an international "terrorist" network that includes the al Qaeda organization said to

be behind the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. Moscow says a Chechen referendum last month on a new constitution provides a political solution. The United States said it voted in favor of the EU motion because of "our deep concern over continuing violations of human rights by Russian armed forces and security services in Chechnya." But it also attacked the "terrorist" acts of Chechen guerrillas, including the seizing of a Moscow theater late last year in which over 100 people died. (Reuters)

AFGHAN-PAKISTAN BORDER CLASH

17 April

The interior minister of Afghanistan, Ali Ahmad Jalali, has said that Afghan border forces clashed overnight with Pakistani militiamen who, he said, had intruded into the southeastern province of Khost. Mr Jalali said the encounter took place around the border village of Gulam Khan, south of the town of Khost. He quoted the local police as saying that Pakistani militiamen penetrated five kilometres into Afghanistan before being forced out by Afghan border forces. Pakistani officials were not immediately available for comment. The incident comes days before a state visit to Pakistan by Afghanistan's President, Hamid Karzai. Correspondents say that the worsening security situation on the border will be high on his agenda. Clashes along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, which critics say was demarcated arbitrarily by the former colonial power, Great Britain, are not uncommon. (BBC)

IRAN REJECTS U.S. SAY IN IRAQ

17 April

Iran is planning a display of military might as its leaders call on coalition forces to leave its neighbour, Iraq. Army chief Major-General Muhammad Salimi said Iran was at its highest state of preparedness and there would be a mass parade to mark Army Day on Friday. But President Mohammad Khatami has said he does not believe the US will instigate further military action in the region, where both Iran and Syria have been described by US President George W Bush as members of an "axis of evil". The Iranian leader also said that his country would not recognize any US-installed administration in Baghdad. "If the Iraqi regime had been toppled by the Iraqi people themselves, we would have organized a big feast in Iran, but occupation of Iraq is a violation of international regulations," Mr Khatami told reporters after a cabinet meeting. "We will not recognize any administration other than an all-Iraqi government. "However, we are not seeking tension or confrontation with anybody." (BBC)

U.S. PREPARED TO BROADEN SECURITY COOPERATION WITH UZBEKISTAN

17 April

A session of the U.S.-Uzbekistan Security Cooperation Council was held on 14-15 April in Washington. During the meeting, U.S. representatives stated that Washington would like to expand defense and military cooperation with Uzbekistan. According to U.S. State Department spokesman Philip Reeker, in addition to security matters, the council discussed economic and democratic reforms in Uzbekistan and current international problems. The two sides intend to continue their cooperation in combating international terrorism and organized crime. The United States intends to offer Uzbekistan advice and assistance in implementing democratic reforms with the goal of strengthening the rule of law, developing civil society, independent media, an independent judiciary, a genuine multi-party system, a market economy, and an effective social safety net. The Uzbek side expressed interest in taking part in the postwar

rehabilitation of Iraq. The Uzbek delegation was led by Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov, who is responsible for the economic sector, and included Foreign Minister Sadyk Safaev, Defense Minister Kadyr Gulyamov, and other officials. (uzreport.com)

RUSSIA WILL NOT SUPPORT "AUTOMATIC" LIFTING OF U.N. SANCTIONS ON IRAQ

17 April

Russia will not support a United States proposal to lift United Nations sanctions on Iraq unless it is confirmed that the country has no weapons of mass destruction, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said. "This decision cannot be automatic. It requires the fulfillment of certain conditions stipulated in relevant UN Security Council resolutions on Iraq," Ivanov told reporters on the sidelines of a foreign policy forum in Moscow. "To take such a decision, we have to assure ourselves whether there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq or not," he added. An unnamed Russian foreign ministry official said earlier Thursday that Moscow wanted UN weapons inspectors, who pulled out of Iraq on the eve of the US-led war in late March, to return to the country to verify US and British allegations that it was developing weapons of mass destruction. US President George W. Bush said Wednesday he would soon submit a UN resolution on ending the 12-year-old crippling economic sanctions, which put trade in Iraqi oil under UN control. Moscow fears that allowing Iraq to trade its substantial oil resources freely on the world market could damage Russia's own economy, which is heavily reliant on oil exports. It wants the United Nations to play a central role in the reconstruction of post-war Iraq, fearing that lucrative reconstruction contracts in Iraq could be allocated almost exclusively to the US-led coalition that ousted Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. As one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council with veto power, it could block any move to lift UN sanctions against Iraq. (AFP)

ARMENIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COURT RULES THAT PRESIDENTIAL POLL WAS VALID

17 April

The Constitutional Court rejected on 16 April a lawsuit by defeated presidential candidate Stepan Demirchian claiming that the February-March presidential ballot was marred by legal, constitutional, and procedural violations and should therefore be declared void, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. But the court acknowledged Demirchian's claim that the official returns from some 40 constituencies are "not credible" due to ballot-box stuffing and other irregularities. The court ordered the Prosecutor-General's Office to launch a criminal investigation into those irregularities. The court also recommended that existing election legislation be amended to provide for the holding of a "referendum of confidence" in the country's leadership, and that such a referendum be held within the next 12 months. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN PRESIDENT REJECTS CALLS FOR 'REFERENDUM OF CONFIDENCE'

17 April

The presidential press service said in a statement released on 17 April that Robert Kocharian will not comply with a Constitutional Court's proposal of 16 April to hold a "referendum of confidence" to allay widespread doubts about the validity of the February-March presidential election. That proposal was contained in the Constitutional Court's ruling rejecting an appeal by defeated presidential candidate Stepan Demirchian that the poll be annulled

in the light of alleged procedural, legal, and constitutional violations. Vahan Hovannisian, one of the leaders of the Yerevan Bureau of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutun which backs Kocharian, argued on 17 April that the Constitutional Court's proposal to hold a "referendum of confidence" contradicts its simultaneous ruling that the presidential election outcome is legal and valid. (Noyan Tapan)

PROTOCOL ENDING TURKMEN-RUSSIAN DUAL CITIZENSHIP PUBLISHED

18 April

The protocol on ending dual citizenship of Turkmenistan and the Russian Federation was published in the Turkmen media. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov signed the measure on 10 April during the latter's state visit to Moscow. At the time, Putin said dual citizenship is no longer needed because those ethnic Russians who wanted to leave Turkmenistan have already done so. Since this remark is so widely at variance with the actual situation, it appears possible that Putin's agreement was demanded by Niyazov as part of the price for a long-term contract on the sale of Turkmen gas to Russia that the Russian side has been trying to obtain for several years. Niyazov presumably saw the ending of dual citizenship as a security measure. Not only have many ethnic Russians obtained Russian passports, but representatives of other nationalities – including ethnic Turkmen -- have acquired them as insurance that they could leave the country. Officials at the Russian Embassy in Ashgabat have said it would take years to process all the outstanding applications for Russian passports. (turkmenistan.ru)

KAZAKH PARLIAMENTARY DEPUTIES OPPOSE LAND CODE

18 April

Deputies of the Kazakh parliament's Mazhilis (lower house) Serik Abdrakhmanov and Serikbay Alibaev told a news conference on 17 April that they and other deputies oppose adoption of a controversial draft Land Code that would permit private landownership, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reported. The code was approved in its first reading by the Mazhilis in March and is subject to a second reading. Abdrakhmanov said that 122 amendments to the code have been proposed by deputies, adding that in his opinion the current laws on parliamentary powers, government, and regional administration must be changed before the Land Code is adopted. Otherwise, the code will protect only the wealthy. The government proposal to introduce private landownership in Kazakhstan as a necessary step in the further development of the country's economy has sparked passionate debate in parliament and among the population. (RFE/RL)

WEAPONS CACHE FOUND IN AFGHANISTAN

18 April

Romanian troops in Afghanistan have discovered thousands of rockets and millions of rounds of ammunition in what the US army has described as the biggest weapons cache ever found by coalition forces in the country. The Romanian soldiers found about 3,000 107mm rockets, 250,000 rounds of machine-gun ammunition and about one million rounds of small arms ammunition, US military spokesman Colonel Roger King said. Around 30 anti-tank mines were also found. The operation was the third such weapons search by the Romanian forces, who usually carry out "force protection" for the coalition base in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, Colonel King was quoted by French news agency AFP as saying. Around

10,000 US-led troops are currently searching for remnants of Afghanistan's former Taliban regime and Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda network in southern and eastern Afghanistan. Operations to contain or capture such fighters have been stepped up in recent months, with eight suspected Taliban fighters killed by US and Afghan fighters in southern Afghanistan earlier in April. On Friday, Afghan security forces arrested the former head of the Taliban's Vice and Virtue Ministry, Mawlawi Qalamuddin. It is not clear what charges Mr Qalamuddin - also the former deputy head of the Taliban's much-feared religious police - will face, or where he was arrested. Meanwhile on Thursday, Afghan Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali said that border forces had clashed overnight with Pakistani militiamen who, he said, had intruded into the south eastern province of Khost. Mr Jalali said the encounter took place around the border village of Gulam Khan, south of the town of Khost. He quoted the local police as saying that Pakistani militiamen penetrated five kilometres (three miles) into Afghanistan before being forced out by Afghan border forces. (BBC)

TURKEY'S FM ADMITS SNAGS IN AZERI-TURKISH PIPELINE PROJECT

20 April

Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul admitted Sunday that problems over land expropriation and taxes in Turkey are holding up work on the construction of a major oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey's Mediterranean coast. In an interview with the CNN-Turk channel, Gul confirmed that British oil multinational BP, the project operator of the planned Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, had complained to the Turkish government over the difficulties. "We have recently received such a letter. They have raised certain complaints... Some expropriation affairs, some financial affairs and tax issues are creating problems," Gul said, without elaborating. He pledged that Ankara would clear the snags in the shortest possible time. "We have taken an extraordinarily speedy action to overcome the problems. This project is very important for us and the prime minister (Recep Tayyip Erdogan) is personally following the matter," Gul said. His comments came atop an announcement from Baku Saturday that a hoped-for loan from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to finance the Azeri section of the conduit has run into problems, apparently due to widespread concerns about the environmental impact of the project. The announcement was seen as a blow for the 2.9-billion-dollar pipeline project to export Caspian oil to the Mediterranean, which has already been dogged by criticism from environmental groups. (AFP)

TURKEY MAY SEND PEACEKEEPERS TO IRAQ

20 April

Turkey has responded "positively" to a U.S. request for peacekeeping troops and experts to help stabilize and rebuild Iraq, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said Sunday. Turkish officials say the Bush administration is seeking assistance in a broad range of areas, from peacekeepers and doctors to experts in communications and infrastructure. Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul said Washington was also looking for experts in explosives and nuclear technology. While no formal arrangements have been made yet, Gul said Turkey has verbally agreed to help reconstruct Iraq, its southern neighbor. "Right now, we look at it positively," Gul told private CNN-Turk television. "A written response will be sent by the beginning of this week." The composition of peacekeeping forces in Iraq is not yet clear. Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Bulgaria and the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have announced plans to send peacekeeping troops. On Saturday, Azerbaijan offered to send 150 peacekeepers to Iraq to help protect Muslim holy sites and

the Turkmen minority — priorities for Turkey as well. Azeris. Gul said Turkey was waiting for a more-detailed request from the United States, and implied there was some concern about how the operation would be financed. Turkey, recovering from an economic crisis, has complained about late reimbursement payments for its peacekeeping troops in Afghanistan. "How their expenses will be met, how they will go and come back, everything should be clarified in writing," Gul said. (AP)

RUSSIAN PARLIAMENTARIAN CALLS FOR BETTER REGULATION OF TAJIK LABOR MIGRATION

21 April

Russian State Duma Deputy Aleksandr Belyakov (Unity), co-chairman of the Tajik-Russian parliamentary commission on cooperation between the lower houses of the countries' parliaments, said on 18 April that the two countries must do more to regulate labor migration. The commission has been meeting in Dushanbe for the last week to discuss a wide range of bilateral issues, including security and combating drug trafficking. Belyakov said that an agreement exists under which Tajikistan may send labor migrants to Russia in an organized manner, but he called for the creation in Russia of agencies or centers to protect the rights of Tajik migrants. He suggested that Turkish centers for Turks working in Europe could provide a model. Belyakov was very complimentary about Tajik laborers, saying Russian employers appreciate "their liking for hard work, honesty, conscientiousness, and decency," as well as their willingness to do work that Russians shun. He added that Russian employers also appreciate the fact that Tajiks do not drink alcohol. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

KAZAKH ACTIVISTS OPPOSE DRAFT LAW ON NONCOMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

21 April

A number of Kazakh nongovernmental organizations oppose a draft law on such bodies that is being discussed by the government. Marat Aytmagambetov, head of the Network of Centers for Support of Civil Society, said in Almaty that the definitions of NGOs contained in the draft are vague and could be interpreted arbitrarily by the authorities. The definition of NGO in the draft includes noncommercial groups that are involved in public-service work and could be used to divide NGOs into those that suit the authorities and those that do not. The draft also includes restrictions on foreign noncommercial organizations working in Kazakhstan that could impact domestic groups, all of which are dependent to some extent on foreign grants from private groups and international institutions. Aytmagambetov said he fears foreign NGOs might have to reduce their investment in Kazakhstan's social sector or withdraw from the country. According to the report, he called for a public discussion of the bill. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

AZERI LEADER COLLAPSES LIVE ON TV

21 April

The President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliiev, has collapsed twice during a ceremony broadcast live on state television, prompting new speculation about his health. Television showed Mr Aliiev, 79, clutching his heart and swaying as he addressed cadets at a military academy in the capital Baku. A statement from the presidential press service later said he had merely lost his balance after suffering a drop in blood pressure and was now recovering well. The leader of the oil-rich Caspian state has been rumoured to be in poor health for years, having suffered a heart attack in 1987. "Something has struck me," he was quoted as saying, moments before he was

whisked away by aides. Mr Aliev resumed his speech after about 15 minutes, looking pale but apparently in control of himself. But a few minutes later he collapsed for a second time, apparently falling backwards on to the floor. Journalists were ushered out of the hall. A few minutes later, the broadcast resumed again, showing smiling Mr Aliyev waving to about 2,000-strong audience, before leaving the hall. The latest incident is bound to renew speculation about his political future. Mr Aliev has undergone surgery more than once in the last four years, but has continued to insist he will run for re-election next year. He had a major heart bypass operation at a clinic in the United States in 1999. In 2002 he is believed to have undergone prostate surgery at the same clinic. He had a hernia operation earlier this year. Political survivor. Mr Aliev is due to celebrate his 80th birthday next month. (BBC)

ARMENIAN PARLIAMENTARY-ELECTION CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

22 April

Official campaigning for the 25 May parliamentary election began on 21 April, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. The Central Election Commission has registered 1,084 candidates representing 17 parties and four blocs to contest the 75 mandates to be distributed under the proportional system. A further 406 candidates are competing for the remaining 56 single-mandate seats. Some 60 prospective candidates were denied registration, including Armen Sargsian, who is currently in detention under suspicion of

involvement in the slaying of Public Television and Radio head Tigran Naghdalian. Arshak Sadoyan, who represents the opposition National Democratic bloc in the outgoing parliament, was denied registration on the pretext that his property declaration incorrectly stated the dimensions of his Yerevan apartment. Hayk Babukhanian of the Union of Constitutional Rights was also denied registration due to alleged omissions in his property declaration. (RFE/RL)

NEW COLLECTIVE-SECURITY PACT TO BE SIGNED AT DUSHANBE SUMMIT

22 April

The leaders of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan will formally sign the new Treaty on Collective Security in Dushanbe on 28 April, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 21 April. The alliance will be known as the Organization of the Treaty on Collective Security (ODKB). The paper said the summit will formalize a split in the CIS between countries oriented toward Moscow and countries that now openly follow U.S. interests. While the ODKB countries are united by common military threats, says "Nezavisimaya gazeta," they also have political and economic disagreements, which means some of them will not follow Moscow's lead in foreign and military policies. "The United States, as a richer and more influential partner, remains Russia's chief rival even in the part of the CIS that is usually considered unequivocally 'pro-Russian.'" (RFE/RL)

