

Central Asia

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ANALYST

BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday, December 3, 2003

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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/December 3, 2003

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Meanwhile, the concerted action of Moscow's clients in Georgia, the breakaway proto-states of Abkhazia, Adjara, and Southern Ossetia would have been impossible without Moscow's support.

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Russia and Israel have formally agreed to ship oil from the Russian oil terminals in the Black Sea via the Israeli Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline, to Asian markets. This pipeline has the potential to greatly decrease the transit time for oil exports from the Mediterranean to the Far East. This development signals a new level of cooperation between Russia and Israel in the energy field, and emergence of the Jewish state as a player in Russian and Eurasian pipeline politics.

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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 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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GEORGIA'S ROSE REVOLUTION ROOTED IN LAW

Claude Zullo

Although most observers have praised the outcome of Georgia's Rose Revolution, some have questioned the legality of its methods. However, a closer look at events over the past month reveals that, in contrast to perceptions, Georgia's opposition/interim government carefully used the law to bring about peaceful change under a mantle of legitimacy. That success may have significant implications as Georgia struggles to deal with corruption. It also sets an important and positive precedent for its neighbors. Finally, events in Georgia highlight the need for donors and implementers of international assistance to take a longer-term commitment to rule-of-law reform in transitioning countries.

BACKGROUND: Pundits in the United States and abroad have had unanimous praise for the swift yet peaceful manner that led to the demise of the Shevardnadze government. Still, some question the legality of the tactics used by Georgia's opposition movement. A closer look however reveals a transition that was not only brought about within the parameters of the law, but one that was actually brought about through the use of law.

The first evidence of this rule-of-law strategy came when opposition forces used the court system to challenge the election results. For example, opposition groups contested the results of the Bolnisi election district – a stronghold of the former government's political machine – and the absentee ballot count of Georgians living abroad, both of which were overturned by the Tbilisi District Court. Indeed, after Georgia's Central Election Commission (CEC) confirmed the results of the parliamentary elections, opposition groups used the court's ruling against the CEC, arguing that the Commission had confirmed the election outcome based on some district results that were already overturned by Georgia's courts. This made the CEC's decision illegal not simply in the opinion of the opposition, but in accordance with rulings handed down by properly constituted courts.

When the government attempted to convene the new parliamentary session, members of the opposition again cited the law to justify entering the chambers — entry that otherwise might have been considered illegal — by accompanying the 65 opposition parliamentarians who had just been elected and thus had every legal right to be in the legislative chamber. The opposition's efforts to block the convening of the new parliament was in fact a legal countermove to block any attempt by President Shevardnadze to cover fraudulent elections results with a veil of legitimacy.

When Shevardnadze issued a state of emergency by presidential decree, opposition leaders knew that the Georgian constitution required the order to be ratified by parliament within 48 hours or rendered void. If parliament could not convene, it could not ratify the decree. Moreover, until the convening of the new parliament, Nino Burjanadze remained the parliamentary speaker and the constitutionally

appointed successor to President Shevardnadze. By securing the president's resignation before the convening of a new parliament, the opposition preserved the legality of the process and the legitimacy of the new leadership.

If the opposition's first victories came from the district court, its legitimacy will likely come from the Supreme Court and Constitutional Court. On November 25, the Supreme Court already overturned the results of the party-list vote, and the Constitutional Court will soon rule on the validity of the entire elections. In response to the Supreme Court's decision, opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili was quoted as saying “[the Court's decision] proves that judicial reform was a success. Of course there are still some problems, but it proves that we did the right thing in reforming the courts.”

IMPLICATIONS: The use of the law by Georgian opposition forces in challenging the November election results and instituting political change has set a powerful precedent both within and outside of Georgia. Internally, the use of legal means to affect change has given the Rose Revolution a mantle of legitimacy at home and abroad. Moreover, that precedent may be useful in breaking with past practices of corruption and patronage. For example, after interim government officials began, almost reflexively, to appoint relatives and cronies to top government posts, civic groups quickly reprimanded them for their actions. Having donned the rule-of-law mantle, they will be held to a higher standard than their predecessors.

Externally, events in Georgia will in varying degrees affect its immediate neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan, both of which recently underwent elections that fell well short of international standards and the outcomes of which remain contested. Curiously enough, the immediate impact has been felt further away in the Western NIS and Central Asia. Anti-government protesters took to the streets in Kiev and Chisinau, inspired by events in Tbilisi. In reaction to Shevardnadze's resignation, Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev pledged to redouble efforts to ensure free and fair future elections and appealed to the United Nations for assistance in upgrading the country's electoral system in advance of parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005.

Moreover, events in Georgia may ultimately disprove the theory that some countries are permanently stuck in a

political state somewhere between authoritarianism and democracy and that the democratic transition paradigm has come to an end. If Georgia is able to consolidate the democratic gains of its rose revolution while safeguarding stability, it could conceivably become the first country of a second wave of democratization to sweep the post-Communist NIS region and may set the stage for further waves thereafter, particularly in places like Central Asia.

CONCLUSIONS: It is no accident that Georgian opposition leaders, most of whom are lawyers by training, understood the importance of lending legitimacy to their actions by working within the guidelines of the law. At the same time, there has to be a sober recognition that the legalistic approach taken by Georgia's opposition was fed by years of persistent, often seemingly futile efforts to develop a

respect for and use of the rule of law among leaders and citizens. Perhaps the main policy conclusion to draw from these events is the need a longer-term commitment on the part of international assistance donors and implementers to advancing the rule of law. The United States and other international governments deserve considerable credit for laying the foundation of legal reform in Georgia, which ultimately contributed to the peaceful transfer of authority. However, an even greater commitment is needed in order to consolidate the success of the rose revolution and to plant the seeds for similar revolutions in other countries in transition.

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PARLIAMENT CONSIDERS LAW ON STATUS OF KYRGYZ LANGUAGE

The Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic is presently considering a new law proposals on the status of the State language. One was proposed by the National committee on state language under the presidential administration, while the second was submitted by deputy Bektur Asanov. Both were targeted to enhance the status of the official language, Kyrgyz.

Both law proposals comprise 11 articles that concern every citizen of Kyrgyz Republic, given the multinational character of the country and the presence of over eighty nations with their own language in Kyrgyzstan. Specifically, these law proposals require at least a third of the broadcasting, mass media and advertisement information to be in Kyrgyz, a transition to the Latin alphabet, and a pay rise for state employees knowing the Kyrgyz language.

This law is to replace the present law, which was adopted in 1989, during Soviet times. Lawmakers and state officials claim the present law does not fit the current situation in the country and should be reconsidered.

The presidential administration believes its own proposal is the most flexible and expedient among analogous laws within the CIS. "We suppose more than 50% of main TV programs will be broadcasted in the state language, since Kyrgyzstan is a bilingual country", the head of the National committee on state language, Osmonakun Ibrahimov, told the public.

However, in parliamentary hearings, deputy Kurmanov noted that one of the two proposed law had been rewritten from the

older version, and another created on the basis of the analogous Kazakh law "on state language".

Mr. Asanov, sponsor of one of the texts, stated that it is impossible to teach the Kyrgyz language if there is no desire and motivation for it. That's why, in his proposal, the main idea is not to teach the Kyrgyz language for all citizens, as it is envisaged in the presidential project, but development of the language itself. Asanov's project stipulates increased information in the Kyrgyz language and both the development of both fiction and non-fiction literature.

One of the articles envisaged the creation of conditions for learning the Kyrgyz alphabet in Latin the alphabet, as is the case in Uzbekistan. In fact, the Latin alphabet was used before the 1930s, and most Turkic language countries have adopted the Latin alphabet over the Cyrillic one, including Tatarstan in the Russian Federation.

Deputies were more concerned for the political aspects of this proposed law. According to Mr. Asanov's proposal, knowledge of the Kyrgyz language would provide additional financial advantage for persons in state employment. One observer thought such strict measures are not acceptable, since they contradict the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, which states that nobody can be discriminated because of lack of knowledge of the state language.

In order for better teaching of the Kyrgyz language, new literature and financial resources for its teaching and for publications

are necessary. The State commission members believe that money and books need to be on the market for people to develop a better understanding of the Kyrgyz language. Authors of the new legislation promise that the modification of the law on state language will not harm the status of the Russian language.

Deputy Arslanbek Maliev argued there were no reasons to ring a bell on the problem of the Kyrgyz language. He said in Osh, Jalal-Abad, Talas and Issyk kul oblasts, more than 90% of the population speaks in Kyrgyz. Only in Chuy oblasti and in Bishkek city, most of the people speak Russian, because the majority of the Russian-speaking population is concentrated there.

According to Gazeta.kg, the mass media believe talks on a proscribed share of Kyrgyz language broadcasting has been raised due to the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections, because the majority of the electorate lives in the countryside and speak only in Kyrgyz.

As a result of three day talks, author of alternative project deputy Bektur Asanov suggested colleagues accept law proposed by National committee, taking away his proposal.

According to Obshestvenniy rating, Mr. Asanov deliberately was well aware that his proposal would not be accepted. However, he positioned himself to introduce changes to the presidential version of the law that will be presented for deputies by mid-December for second hearings.

Aijan Baltabaeva

GEORGIA'S REVOLUTION: RUSSIA'S SOUR GRAPES

Stephen Blank

Georgia is famous for its wine, but Russia seems to have harvested only sour grapes from Georgia's revolution. Moscow's response to that fall represents a singularly ungracious display of sour grapes, because Moscow quickly grasped that despite its hatred for Shevardnadze, if anything its interests might suffer further defeats due to Georgia's revolution. Putin's complaint that the coup violated Georgia's constitution is a particularly egregious example of crocodile tears given Putin's unending campaign to subvert Russian democracy. Meanwhile, the concerted action of Moscow's clients in Georgia, the breakaway proto-states of Abkhazia, Adjara, and Southern Ossetia would have been impossible without Moscow's support.

BACKGROUND: Shevardnadze was clearly a pro-Western figure but his hands were tied by his own internal misrule, Georgia's weakness, and thus its vulnerability to Russian pressure. Countless statements attest to his desire to join NATO or at least have it protect Georgian energy pipelines. The new regime is even more forthright about its intention to integrate with the West and restore Georgia's integrity. This Westernizing proclivity and Georgia's refusal to allow Russian forces into Georgia's borders with Chechnya infuriated Moscow and hardened its resolve to prevent the stabilization of Georgia as a pro-Western state. Hence the refusal to vacate the bases or relax its hold on Georgia.

Before the elections, notwithstanding the hatred for Shevardnadze, Moscow came to feel that the best outcome in Georgia would be a permanently weak, divided, and unstable Georgia that it could control along with the rebellious proto-states which it could use as leverage against Shevardnadze and by which it could perpetually humiliate him. Therefore Putin initially supported him in the crisis over a visibly corrupted election and vote count. It also is highly probable that Moscow supported Shevardnadze's efforts to bring to bear the Ajarian regime led by Aslan Abashidze and even possibly Russian military forces or the threat of it in the post-election crisis. Some analysts have also suggested that Moscow entertained the hope of having Abashidze succeed Shevardnadze in mid-term or when he would have left office in 2005 or even of engineering such a succession as a condition of its support for Shevardnadze. Yet this gambit failed and Igor Ivanov ended up negotiating Shevardnadze's resignation in favor of the opposition. The new Georgian government is clearly coalescing around three post-Western leaders, Mikhail Saakashvili, Nino Burjanadze, and Zurab Zhvania. The IMF and the U.S. government are rushing support to the provisional government which will preside until the January 4 elections in order to rescue it from the economic disaster that Georgia now faces. At the same time it is also clear that the new regime aims to restore Georgia's unity though hopefully on the basis of a more democratic and inclusive basis than in the early 1990s. Undoubtedly it will also turn to the West for support and maybe protection, perhaps leading to an increase in the U.S.

military support program there and to greater efforts to join NATO and overcome Georgia's internal debilities. While the challenges of internal misrule, economic catastrophe, and ethnic secessionism abetted by foreign intervention are daunting, the new regime clearly aims to prevent foreign governments like Russia from exploiting internal weaknesses. And it is this defeat that explains Moscow's sour grapes and ungenerous attitude toward the new Georgian leaders. Nobody can deny that Russia has a vital interest in Georgia's stability or that the massive outflow of refugees should Georgia collapse would be a problem. Neither would new ethnic wars between Tbilisi and its rebellious provinces of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria be in Russia's interests even if it was not the main foreign support for those rebellious satrapies.

IMPLICATIONS: Moscow clearly has a strange way of showing its solicitude for Georgian stability. And what is more relevant to all the other Central Asian, South Caucasian and other CIS states is what this episode reveals to us about Russia's policy and goals for the region. First of all, it is clear that Moscow will staunchly support repressive and corrupt dictatorships throughout the area because their misrule allows Russia to achieve commanding strategic economic and political positions from which it cannot be dislodged. Weak regimes in the successor states generally breed polarizing political factions contending for power one of whom generally looks to Moscow for support and believes its future is best served by a Russian orientation. This tendency perpetuates the longstanding imperial tradition of Russian statecraft. Russia will try to make itself the indispensable support to those governments even against their aroused masses. As Putin has stated, Russia will not "export democracy". But it will (as we now see in Lithuania and Turkmenistan for example) export criminality, support for coups, and assistance for weakened dictators who lead their countries to a dead end. Moscow will also exploit not just misrule but also ethnic and other cleavages or the threat of terrorism to obtain permanent military bases from which it will not leave and from which it can exercise decisive military influence just as its proconsuls did in eighteenth century Poland and more broadly throughout the Tsarist empire.

In short, Russia still seeks a neo-colonialist status quo in the CIS and will employ whatever instruments of power that are available to it, even if they are limited, in support of those goals. It does not take a rocket scientist to see that such a policy of perpetuating misrule and backwardness is a recipe for more violence, repression, and ultimately explosions.

In Georgia we were lucky that violence did not break out although the situation came close to it and violence could yet start again. But we cannot be certain that similar luck will be found when the next such crisis arises. And the advent of another crisis, given the pervasive misrule throughout the former Soviet Union is inevitable. Russia's support for the conditions that will make an explosion or multiple explosions in the CIS inevitable is inexplicable other than with reference to its short-sighted quest for consolidation of its own authoritarian and corrupt police capitalism at home and empire abroad. Unfortunately this policy is neither sustainable nor able to provide security either for Russia, Georgia, or anyone else in the CIS, including the dictators it is supposed to help.

CONCLUSIONS: Russia's obsession with empire and with great power rivalry strongly shows us that the surest

guarantee of security for the new states is the peaceful democratization of their polities and societies. While the United States and its institutions played a major role in helping to facilitate this victory, Russia contributed only by helping to avert violence that was potentially dangerous to itself. But it clearly has defined its security interests as being in opposition to the reform of these troubled societies. Thus Russian policy inevitably must lead to a criminal neglect and suppression of the forces that would sustain societal security throughout the CIS. As this support for the policies that would sustain backwardness and insecurity is contraindicated to the needs of the Russian people and Russia as a whole, viewed in the light of contemporary strategic realities, Russian policy, for all of its vaunted Realpolitik, is worse than a crime, it is a mistake.

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AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION EXPERIENCES HARD TIMES

After the presidential elections of October 15, the political life of Azerbaijan has dramatically changed. The arrest of some leaders and members of political parties accused of participation in the mass disorders on October 15-16 led to the creation of artificial obstacles for the opposition press, and other methods of pressure which have had a serious political impact on opposition of the country.

Leading opposition parties have begun to concede their place to other parties, which were less influential before the elections. A quite new political situation is developing in the country.

The theme of dialogue between opposition and authorities is again on the agenda. The idea of a dialogue belongs to the western structures, who compel the conflicting political camps in Azerbaijan to sit down at a negotiating table.

However, the Democratic (DPA), Popular Front (PFPA) and Musavat parties do not take the idea of a dialogue between authorities and opposition seriously, as they think, that authorities use talks about dialogue only as an aim to demonstrate democratic values.

Commenting on the authorities' offer to a dialogue, PFPA leader Ali Kerimli stated that the opposition always supported a dialogue. "However until now authorities did not build civil relations with the opposition, and I do not believe that it is possible today. A dialogue can begin only if the authorities change their attitude to the opposition".

The deputy to the executive secretary the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party Mubariz Gurbanli, on the other hand, argued that if opponents of the government do not recognize Ilham Aliyev as the legitimate president, it would be inappropriate to speak about a dialogue in general.

Meanwhile, the Central Council of the National independence party (AMIP) has reacted positively to the offer of a dialogue. "Unfortunately, many in our society do not understand the necessity of carrying out a dialogue between opposition and authorities. Today mutual relations between authorities and opposition develop outside of the legal field. However, both the authorities and the opposition should adhere to the same rules of the game. This is the sense of a dialogue between authorities and opposition" AMIP leader Etibar Mamedov declared.

AMIP has also issued a separate statement with an appeal to the authorities to amnesty all arrested persons during the mass disorders of October 15-16. It emphasized that this step can create a necessary precondition for the beginning of a dialogue between opposition and authorities.

A meeting was held between opposition representatives, initiated by the leader of the Civil Solidarity party, Sabir Rustamkhanli, where the post-elections situation in the country was discussed, along with the perspectives to begin a political dialogue with the authorities. Representatives of opposition criticized themselves.

According to social democratic leader Zardusht Alizade, past presidential elections have caused a feeling of disappointment to the Azerbaijani people and the international community. "The opposition is dissatisfied with the results of the elections and has taken people out on streets, but because of its weakness it

was not well organized. The opposition had already lost when a faulty Election Code was adopted".

The Chairman of the Party of National Steadhood Nemat Panahli has declared that authorities effectively used the inability of the opposition to prevent falsification during the elections. According to analysts, despite of a formal variety of ideological orientation

in Azerbaijan, the process of forming sound political parties is not complete. Therefore the majority of parties are grouped around a leader. The social base of the parties have nothing to do with ideology or the definition of a political line.

At the same time, last week at a conference of monitoring groups of human rights organizations, an appeal was made to the authorities to put an end to reprisals. "In order to begin a dialogue between authorities and the opposition, it is necessary to put an end to political persecutions and to release all persons arrested during the events of October 15-16".

Gulnara Ismailova

TURKMEN OPPOSITION UNITES, BUT REMAINS WEAK

Hooman Peimani

Four Turkmen opposition groups created a united front in the last week of September. The leaders of the groups operating practically only outside of Turkmenistan established the Union of Democratic Forces of Turkmenistan (UDFT). Despite this development, the Turkmen opposition is still too weak to destabilize the Niyazov administration. However, against a background of a growing dissatisfaction with the status quo even within the Turkmen elite, the UDFT's creation indicates an emerging hope among pro-Western opposition groups in Central Asia to turn themselves from powerless and divided exiled political groups into a united force. If successful, they could be in a better position to take advantage in pursuing their political objectives of an increasing international pressure on the Turkmen regime and of the concern in the United States about the long-term stability of the Caspian region.

BACKGROUND: Unlike Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan did not experience the emergence of many anti-regime political groups upon its independence in 1991. As the worsening economic situation and the lowering living standards all over Central Asia created a growing dissatisfied population in the region, the establishment of Turkmenistan's totalitarian regime prevented in that country the translation of emerging popular dissatisfaction into an anti-regime movement capable of challenging the ruling elite. Thanks to its repressive measures, the Turkmen regime created around President Saparmurad Niyazov's cult of personality simply removed the possibility of active and growing opposition groups inside the country. Regardless of their ideologies, objectives and types of activities, real or perceived political opponents were suppressed under different pretexts, including espionage, coup attempts, corruption and the weakening of the president or his regime. The continuation of a policy of zero-tolerance of political dissent in any form has since prevented the formation and/or survival of active political groups inside the country. The political opponents have found no choice but to leave their country for the safety of mainly Russia and European countries where their opposition to the Turkmen political system is tolerated. As a result, the active Turkmen opposition groups are foreign-based small and weak organizations formed by dissidents inside and outside of the Turkmen political system with no apparent operation in the country, while lacking any meaningful popularity among the dissatisfied Turkmen. In short, they are unable to pose a threat to President Niyazov's one-party political system.

IMPLICATIONS. Against this background, in late September four Turkmen exiled groups gathered in Prague to establish the UDFT. They included the Renaissance Socio-Political Movement, the Republican Party of Turkmenistan, the United Democratic Opposition of Turkmenistan (also known as ODOT) and the Watan Socio-Political Movement. The first meeting of the UDFT members is planned before the end of the current year.

It is still unclear what type of organization the UDFT is, given that the statements of its officials made at the end of

the Prague meeting were broad and vague. The new group describes itself as a democratic organization advocating a multiparty political system based on free democratic elections and market reforms in the Turkmen economy while being committed to the principles of democracy, human rights and freedom of the media. It also commits itself to the removal of President Niyazov from power. This objective justifies its specifying as "top priority" the drafting of an alternative constitution to the existing Turkmen one in preparation for the post-Niyazov era. According to its communiqué released on September 29, the UDFT therefore stands for "the interaction and unification of the efforts of parties, movements and groups standing on a political platform, which opposes Niyazov's regime". Hence, the group sees itself not just as a political party, but as a growing union of the Turkmen opposition groups, which is open "to all supporters of democratic reforms in Turkmenistan."

While it is too early to judge this new group, certain factors raise question about its survival, its importance and its ability to turn itself into an alternative to the existing Turkmen political system. As reported, basic organization issues, including the UDFT's leadership structure, are yet to be settled, indicative of its uncertain future and of a hasty effort to take advantage of a changing international attitude towards the Turkmen regime. In such situation, the group could be seen as the only available organized alternative. Also, it is still unclear how the UDFT seeks to achieve its declared democratic objectives and, in particular, their prerequisite, i.e., the ousting of President Niyazov from power. On the one hand, this is due to the absence of any concrete statement by the group on such important matters. On the other, this is a result of the group's lack of popular support and an organization inside Turkmenistan.

Moreover, the political records of at least some of its leading figures as reflected in their significant ties with the Niyazov administration cast doubt about the group's commitment to democracy, in general, and to its declared democratic objectives, in particular. For example, Avdi Kuliev, the ODOT head, was Turkmenistan's foreign minister until June 1992 when he resigned in protest. Another example is

Nurmukhammet Hanamov, a co-founder of the Republican Party of Turkmenistan, who was Turkmenistan's ambassador to Turkey and Israel before his 2002 defection.

CONCLUSIONS. Despite the expression of hope by its leading members and some Turkmen dissidents, the creation of the UDFT in itself did not begin a new era in the anti-Niyazov movement qualitatively different from the previous one. In its current format and unless it makes an effort to address its deficiencies, the group is not any different from other Turkmen opposition groups, which suffer from major handicaps, i.e., weak foreign-based organization, lack of popularity in Turkmenistan and lack of a clear and realistic

plan of action to achieve their objectives. However, its emergence on the political scene has a symbolic value as it could contribute as a factor, possibly as a model, to the unity of divided Turkmen opposition, provided its forming groups hold together and expand. Yet it has no realistic chance for posing a challenge to President Niyazov's authority so long as it remains a foreign-based group with no relevance to the realities of Turkmenistan.

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NORTH KAZAKHSTAN TARGETED BY ISLAMIC EXTREMISM

Two Uzbek nationals, Azamat Iskandarov and Haydar Makhmudov, were handed over to Uzbekistan on November 20 by the Kazakh security forces. The 24-year old Iskandarov and Makhmudov, suspected of belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and wanted by the Prosecutor General of Uzbekistan, were illegally living in Kazakhstan since July.

The extradition of two suspected terrorists was presented by law enforcement bodies as an illustration of the vigilance of security bodies. But the fact that foreign nationals, members of Taliban armed units trained in guerilla camps of Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the years 1998-2001 were residing in the country so long, using forged identity papers, only reminds the population of its vulnerability to possible terrorist attacks.

Despite some pessimistic moods in the society, rooted in the growing sense of instability in the inflammable region, Kazakhstan is still believed to be the most secure place in Central Asia. The government keeps close watch over the activities of various sects. Another important factor, which contributes to security of the country from religious extremism, some experts believe, is the ongoing economic growth of the country. Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country recognized as a market economy by the United States, a fact proudly reiterated by government officials.

But, however important, the economic factor should not be overestimated, warn more cautious analysts. Speaking at the international conference on security in Central Asia, held under the aegis of the Kazakh Institute for Strategic Research (KISR), the Center of Internal Policy and Analysis and UNESCO representatives, the deputy director of the KISR Askar Shomanov singled out terrorism and religious extremism as the main threat impeding the security of the region.

In itself, that statement contains nothing new to those who follow the latest developments in the south of Kazakhstan. In August, security forces reported a successful crackdown on Islamic extremist groups in Shymkent. A spacious apartment room, rented by the followers of this sect, virtually served as an underground printing house, which churned out dozens of copies of extremist leaflets. Nobody could tell how many of them had been distributed. All the equipment was seized by the police.

It should be admitted that such half-measures do not discourage Islamic extremists at all. Beaten in one region, they invariably resurface in another. In mid-November, not long after the detention of Islamists in Shymkent, a missionary of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir movement was detained in the city of Baikonur, at the heart of the spacecraft launching site. It is not at all a surprise that he appeared in such a heavily guarded place. Some sources say that Islamic extremists even have connections with local government officials in South Kazakhstan. Taking into consideration the huge financial resources possessed by extremist organizations that allow them to own modern printing equipment and move freely across the country one cannot rule out the possibility of corrupt government officials rendering illegal support to Islamists.

The Hizb-ut-Tahrir member detained in Baikonur confessed to the police that his intention was to reestablish the banned local organization of the religious movement in the city. The final aim of the organization, as he indicated, was to create an Islamic state, a Caliphate, in south Kazakhstan and to unleash a holy war against "infidels".

Notably, most of the adepts of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir teachings are young people. That leads some observers to conclude that the higher rate of youth unemployment in South Kazakhstan favors the recruitment of teenagers for the religious

movement. Another obvious explanation is that the southern part of the country is mainly Muslim-populated. But in the light of recent developments, all that can be only partly true. In fact, the influence of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir is not strictly limited to the South. They are slowly but firmly moving to the North, closer to the Russian border. Not long ago two young members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir appeared in Pavlodar and Ekibastuz, industrially developed and socially well-faring regions. "Why are Americans stationed in Uzbekistan?" ran headlines of the leaflets in Kazakh language seized from the militants. Mistakes abound in these anti-American texts to such an extent that experts believe they are written not by home-grown Islamists but by foreigners.

Before that incident, Pavlodar, a cosmopolitan city where a newly built synagogue, a Russian Orthodox Church and a Mosque symbolize spiritual harmony, was considered to be quite unassailable for extremists. Today only few people harbor that illusion, although authorities are overcautious not to spread panic among the residents. Densely populated industrial centers, according to the experts of the Risk Assessment Group, may become the scene of extremist advances. Polls conducted among the residents of Almaty showed that 35% of them fear urban terrorism within the next 5 years.

True, there are not so many people in Kazakhstan who readily embrace the bellicose ideas of religious extremist organizations. To all appearances, militant Islamists understand that and prefer to lie low for some time, limiting their activities to propaganda. It is not to be overlooked, however, that under the guise of reviving the lost spiritual values, extremist forces are winning minds and souls of young people.

Marat Yermukanov

ISRAEL BECOMES AN EURASIAN OIL TRANSIT COUNTRY

Ariel Cohen

Russia and Israel have formally agreed to ship oil from the Russian oil terminals in the Black Sea via the Israeli Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline, to Asian markets. This pipeline has the potential to greatly decrease the transit time for oil exports from the Mediterranean to the Far East. This development signals a new level of cooperation between Russia and Israel in the energy field, and emergence of the Jewish state as a player in Russian and Eurasian pipeline politics.

BACKGROUND: During November 3-5 summit in Russia, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Russian president Vladimir Putin have signed a historic agreement making Israel the first Middle Eastern transit country for Russian oil.

The 158-mile (254 km) pipeline from the Red Sea port of Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba to Ashkelon was constructed in the 1960s, to ship Iranian oil to European and U.S. markets. Thus, the direction of the pipeline was South-North. After the collapse of the Shah regime in 1979, the pipeline was used to ship small amounts of Egyptian oil from Abu Rudeis field to Israel. According to the Director General of the Ashkelon pipeline company Emmanuel Sakal, Israel has accomplished improvements to reverse the flow of the pipeline over the last two years, to accommodate shipping of the Russian and Eurasian oil to Asian markets.

Meanwhile, Russia has been experiencing an important infrastructure bottleneck while shipping its oil to the fast-growing and highly lucrative Asian markets. Russian energy officials have realized that the plans for pipelines from Siberia to China and the Pacific port of Nakhodka may be years and billions of dollars away. After YUKOS oil company ran afoul of the Kremlin in Spring and summer of 2003, the Russian government has decided not to pursue a pipeline to the Northern Chinese city of Daikang – the YUKOS-preferred route. Instead, Moscow has opted for a much more expensive project – the pipeline to the Russian Pacific port of Nakhodka, from which Russian companies can ship oil not just to China, but also to Japan, Korea and the West Coast of the U.S.

IMPLICATIONS: As Russian oil exports to Europe have stagnated due to slow rates of economic growth there, Russian companies have decided that an alternative route to ship oil to China and India must be found. The oil major LUKoil, and the government-controlled Rosneft are prime candidates to ship oil via Israel as they control pipelines and terminals along the Black Sea Coast. From the ports of Novorossiisk and Tuapse, Russian tankers will pass via the Bosphorus Straits and unload at the slip dock at the port of Ashkelon, from which it will be pumped across the Negev desert to Eilat. Most importantly, this significantly shortens the shipping time and decreases costs: a Very Large Tanker (VLT) with 300,000 tonnage travels for 35-30 days from the

Mediterranean to China, and only around 10-14 days from Eilat to Shanghai.

The Israeli ports can accommodate tankers larger than those capable of passing through the Suez Canal. And while the tariffs in the Israeli pipeline amount to \$.40 a barrel, Egyptians are charging higher rates for transit through the canal, which is a major target of terrorism.

The Israelis, as well, may worry about threats to pipeline security from radical Islamist organizations, such as Al Qaeda, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad. Today, oil routes are no longer safe. The attack on the French supertanker the Limbourg in October 2003, and the Al Qaeda attempts to penetrate the information technology department of Saudi Aramco, the national oil company, demonstrate that terrorists are targeting high 'emotional value' economic targets. Moreover, while Hamas and Jihad go after human-rich targets, such as buses and restaurants, they so far targeted Israeli infrastructure only occasionally and unsuccessfully. Al Qaeda does not seem to care about Israel enough to endanger its somewhat depleted force. Moreover, oil burns, but does not explode, and pipelines can be patched up relatively easily.

In this sense, the Israeli North-South pipeline from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea with a capacity of 1.1 million barrel a day offers a significant shortcut for Russian and Eurasian oil, which targets fast-growing Asian markets. It will be an ideal outlet also for the Kazakh and Azerbaijani fields, which are coming online. The pipeline's capability may be boosted to 1.6 mbd by installing additional pumping stations. As it is aiming to provide Very Sweet Light Crude (VSLC) from the Caspian, additional supply may come from the Baku-Supsa and from Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipelines when the latter is completed around 2005-2006.

Israel has excellent relations with Azerbaijan and the administration of President Ilham Aliyev, as well as with the Government of Georgia, so that political pressure from Arab countries is unlikely to undermine Israel's oil transit role. While the immediate economic impact is modest (about \$140 million a year), an increase in volume of shipping, more demand for Israel's own needs, and provision of stock for Israel's petrochemical industry are additional benefits. As a result, the project is likely to be sustainable and profitable.

CONCLUSIONS: Israel is likely to increase its profile in the Caspian area, and the energy politics of Russia and the Caucasus. It is likely, as it did in the past, to play a mediator's role in conflicts between Moscow and Washington. Ariel Sharon in particular, together with the leader of Russian-speaking Israel Our Home Party Avigdor Lieberman are keen to see the project implemented. Sharon has taken time to cultivate Putin and try to balance the Russian foreign policy and security elite's traditional tilt towards the Arab world.

Moreover, Sharon has championed in the past a spur to Israel of the Russian Gazprom natural gas pipeline Blue Stream to Turkey. That project was derailed in favor of an Egyptian gas pipeline which never happened. At this point, however, the Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline shows that Israel is becoming an actor in the regional energy field as well.

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INTERVIEW WITH GEORGIAN ACTING PRESIDENT NINO BURJANADZE

Three weeks of demonstrations came to an end on November 23 with the resignation of the Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze. The interim leader, Nino Burjanadze of the "Burjanadze-Democrats" now urges for normality to return to the country's capital and pledges that presidential elections will be held within 45 days – an election that Burjanadze's close ally Mikhail Saakashvili is predicted to win. However, problems are mounting as the leadership announced to the Georgian media that there were no state funds available for pensions and civil servants' salaries. Also, with the Adjarian leader, Aslan Abashidze courting the Russian leadership, accompanied by the de facto President of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, Georgia's future remains volatile.

"Now the next step in Georgia is to ensure stability and peace. Tomorrow [read November 24] I will meet with the national security council and discuss how this can be done", said Burjanadze on November 23. While urging both the Georgian people and political leaders such as Adjarian leader Aslan Abashidze to stay calm, festivities were inevitably taking place in the capital and Burjanadze described the scenes taking place outside her office. "Thousands of people are still celebrating on the streets of Tbilisi, they are honking their car horns and waving with flags. Everyone is very relieved that a very serious crisis have been resolved peacefully. The people of Georgia have defended their freedom, civil rights and the right to free and fair elections. They have won a very serious battle. This happened after three weeks of demonstrations in harsh weather conditions. The people deserved a better government and to be better governed. I will do my best to ensure that free and fair elections can be held within 45 days as the constitution prescribes."

Burjanadze was unexpectedly chosen chairperson of the parliament in 2001, replacing another leading oppositional leader and ally, Zurab Zhvania, leader of the political bloc the "United Democrats". With a Ph.D. in

International Law, she became a member of Parliament in 1995 and was chosen chairperson of the parliament's foreign affairs committee in 2000. Although viewed largely as belonging to a clan closely linked to president, (her father is similarly to Shevardnadze an old apparatchik and Shevardnadze is Burjanadze's godfather) she has during the last two years openly distanced herself from the now deposed president. Her fierce stance against corruption has made her one of the most popular politicians in the country. Initially viewed as lacking the political base and connections necessary to succeed in Georgian political life, her position has been strengthened in the last year by closer ties to Mikhail Saakashvili, leader of the National Movement, and Zhvania and the United Democrats. For the moment, the three oppositional leaders keep a united front, with Saakashvili appearing as joint candidate in the presidential elections, while Shevardnadze's allies are resigning *en masse*. As more everyday worries of public administration such as the payment of government salaries and pensions are replacing the giddiness of ousting Shevardnadze, unity may however be difficult to preserve.

Indeed, the forthcoming elections may prove a litmus test of the Troyka's strength. As the demonstrations in Tbilisi were initiated by the opposition with demands on the elections being re-held due to election fraud, there is both external and internal political pressure that the presidential and parliamentary elections taking place on January 4, 2004, are conducted in compliance with international standards. The new leadership has received the full support of the OSCE and the U.S., but conducting the elections in a democratic manner may still prove difficult. Firstly, the last election took considerably longer time to plan and it is highly unlikely that the problems of incomplete voting lists, ballot stuffing and other trademarks of Caucasian elections will just vanish in the hands of the new Georgian leadership and the new CEC. Secondly, Saakashvili will most probably

win the presidential election. But one should remember that it was not only Shevardnadze faithfuls that participated in fraudulent activities during the recent parliamentary elections in November; numerous MPs, local as well as regional leaders may feel threatened by a transparent election. The interim government has a strong following in Tbilisi but it is difficult to estimate their support in the regions. This being said, one thing is almost certain, Eduard Shevardnadze will not participate. Burjanadze commented on Shevardnadze's ousting from power as an unfortunate choice of friends: "Unfortunately he surrounded himself with advisors and persons with very little connection to the Georgian people. This was his biggest mistake. But I don't think he understood that until now and now it is too late. I have not had the opportunity to speak to Mr. Shevardnadze yet. Of course I will speak to him soon. As he has already won the presidential elections twice, he is not allowed according to the constitution to run again. If he would like to, he can of course run for parliament, although I don't think that he would do that."

The 30-year Shevardnadze era in Georgian political life has come to an end and a new era awaits Georgia. One person that has already openly challenged the new leadership is the Russian-oriented leader of Adjara, Aslan Abashidze. With control of the Black Sea port in Batumi and the most fertile soil in the country, Adjara is practically self-sufficient. In line with the saying from the film the Godfather "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer", Abashidze's self-government of Adjara was tolerated through a "gentlemen's agreement", between Abashidze and Shevardnadze. With Shevardnadze gone from the political scene, the terms have to be renegotiated. The new leadership claims to seek stability and peace but stark challenges await it.

Johanna Petersson

NEWS BITES

GEORGIA'S NEW LEADER REPLACES MENTOR **24 November**

The former Soviet republic of Georgia has undergone a political upheaval, with opposition forces taking over the country's parliament and forcing the resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze. Nino Burjanadze, 39, the woman who has become the acting president of Georgia, has replaced the man who was once her mentor. The mother of two, who comes from a well-connected and wealthy family in Georgia, was initially closely associated with the ousted president, Eduard Shevardnadze. Her father heads the former Soviet republic's bread and flour monopoly and financed Mr Shevardnadze's last presidential campaign. But her gradual disillusionment with the former president culminated on Saturday when she took over his role for an interim period before new parliamentary elections are held. Mr Shevardnadze fled parliament, leaving Ms Burjanadze to take to the podium. She urged the angry demonstrators to calm down and behave civilly. Following Mr Shevardnadze's resignation she explained that, under the constitution, presidential duties passed to her until elections are held within 45 days. After taking power, the acting president praised the people of Georgia for bringing about a peaceful, "velvet revolution". She told the BBC: "The people were fighting for freedom, for democracy in the country for their votes. "They tried to defend their votes and I am really very happy that this revolution ended without blood." Ms Burjanadze, who is married to Georgia's deputy prosecutor general, promised free and fair elections. She was also quick to outline the country's long-term foreign policy aims. "We really want to be a member of Atlantic alliance and European Union as soon as possible," she said. And although they may have had their political differences, the interim leader showed she was not going to totally desert her former ally by supporting his desire to continue living in Georgia. "He has the right to choose where to live. He will have full security guarantees, he and his family," she said. (BBC)

TURKMEN MOSQUE CLOSED DOWN FOR REFUSING TO PLACE PRESIDENT'S BOOK NEXT TO KORAN **24 November**

A mosque in a Turkmen town outside Ashgabat has been closed down by authorities because its imam refused to display President Saparmurat Niyazov's book on Turkmen history and traditions, the "Rukhnama," beside the Koran, according to Norwegian-based Forum-18, a group that monitors religious freedom in the former Soviet Union. The town in which the incident took place was not identified, apparently out of fear of retaliation against the imam. Prior to the closure of the mosque by national security agents, a television crew had demanded to film the Koran lying next to the "Rukhnama" in order to show that Muslims honored both books equally. The imam refused on the grounds that such an act would violate a basic tenet of Islam. Sunni Islam is one of the two confessions allowed to function legally in Turkmenistan -- the other is Russian Orthodoxy -- but

this has not prevented individual Sunni clerics and congregations from being harassed by authorities. (KyrgyzInfor)

PUTIN CALLS GEORGIAN PRESIDENT'S OUSTER 'LOGICAL RESULT' **25 November**

At a 24 November cabinet session, President Vladimir Putin said that the change of leadership in Tbilisi was "the logical result of serious systemic mistakes in foreign, domestic, and economic policy" made under former President Eduard Shevardnadze, ORT and RTR reported. Putin said Shevardnadze's foreign policy ignored "the historic and cultural roots of the Georgian people," while domestic policy was "helpless maneuvering between different political forces" and economic policy was "reduced to a demeaning struggle for handouts from abroad." Relations between Russia and Georgia have not been simple in recent years, but it should be stressed that Shevardnadze was not a dictator, noted the Russian president. Therefore, he continued, we are worried that change of power in Georgia occurred under "strong coercive pressure." Those who organize and encourage such actions take a great responsibility on themselves, Putin added. Putin also said that he hopes the new Georgian leadership will "restore the tradition of friendship" between the Russian and Georgian peoples. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN INQUIRES ABOUT ITS CITIZENS AT GUANTANAMO

25 November

Kazakh Foreign Minister Qasymzhomart Toqayev told Interfax-Kazakhstan on 25 November that his ministry is trying to determine whether any Kazakh citizens were among the prisoners released from the Guantanamo Bay detention facility on 17 November. Toqayev said the Kazakh side has been discussing with its U.S. counterpart the return to Kazakhstan of the Kazakh citizens incarcerated at Guantanamo, but added that the situation is complicated by the admissions of some of the prisoners that they took part in military operations with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Kazakh National Security Committee has reported that none of the Kazakh citizens held at Guantanamo admitted having fought for the Taliban. The committee claimed they had been employed as support personnel. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

TURKMEN STATE AND OPPOSITION MARK ANNIVERSARY OF PURPORTED ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

26 November

The state-controlled Turkmen media marked the first anniversary of an alleged assassination attempt against President Saparmurat Niyazov on 25 November 2002 by publishing a commentary distributed by the Turkmen State News Agency calling on the population to rally more closely behind the president. The same day, the Turkmen opposition website gundogar.org posted a report on a meeting of opposition figures

in Vienna on 23-24 November to mark the anniversary and to discuss ways of promoting democratization in Turkmenistan and removing Niyazov. The meeting, which brought together leaders of various exile groups including the Republican Party of Turkmenistan, the People's Democratic Movement, the Watan Social-Political Movement, and the United Democratic Opposition, was also attended by representatives of international human rights groups and the media. A working group was set up to draft a post-Niyazov constitution. Some Turkmen opposition figures reportedly refused to attend the meeting for fear of being branded "international terrorists" by the regime in Ashgabat. (RFE/RL)

UZBEKISTAN MISSES ANNUAL COTTON GOAL

26 November

Bad weather has put an end to Uzbekistan's annual cotton harvest and, according to preliminary data from the country's Agriculture Ministry, only 2.856 million tons of cotton was gathered this year. The independent news agency zamon.info reported on 23 November that this is the poorest harvest in many years. The government planned a harvest of 3.6 million tons and took extraordinary measures to prevent cotton harvested in Uzbekistan from being smuggled by Uzbek pickers into Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where prices being paid for raw cotton were much higher. Cotton specialists at the Uzbek Academy of Sciences attributed the 2003 cotton shortfall to spring rains that necessitated the replanting of one-third of the land sown to cotton and delayed the harvest by three weeks. The report noted that international financial agencies say the government monopoly on the export of cotton deprives Uzbek growers of incentive to produce. (RFE/RL)

NEW GEORGIAN LEADERSHIP NAMES PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

26 November

At a joint press conference in Tbilisi on 26 November, the three opposition leaders who spearheaded the campaign for President Shevardnadze's resignation in the wake of the rigged 2 November parliamentary elections announced the nomination of a single candidate, National Movement Chairman Mikhail Saakashvili, for the preterm presidential election scheduled for 4 January. Acting President Nino Burdjanadze said the decision to align behind a single candidate was dictated by the need to "preserve and protect the achievement we have won together with the Georgian people." Saakashvili said that Burdjanadze, whom he termed "the most attractive political face in Georgia," will head the opposition list of candidates in the parliamentary ballot, for which no date has yet been set. Former Economy Minister Lado Papava, who is now Burdjanadze's main economic adviser, told Reuters on 26 November that "Saakashvili deserves to become president and Nino Burdjanadze has little chance of beating him." (Caucasus Press)

AZERBAIJAN, RUSSIA SEEK TO EXPAND ECONOMIC COOPERATION

28 November

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev met in Baku on 28 November with visiting Russian Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko to discuss ways to expand bilateral economic cooperation. Aliyev expressed the hope that more Russian

companies will invest in Azerbaijan. In talks with Azerbaijan State Oil Company head Natick Aliyev (no relation to the president), Khristenko proposed revising the 1996 agreement under which Azerbaijan pledged to export 5 million tons of oil via the Baku-Tikhoretsk-Novorossiisk pipeline beginning in 2002. Aliyev said increasing exports from the present 2.5 million tons annually would not be advantageous due to the high tariffs (\$15.67 per metric ton) and the fact that high-quality Azerbaijani crude is degraded by being transported by the same pipeline that is used for inferior-quality Urals crude. Khristenko and Azerbaijani First Deputy Prime Minister Abbas Abbasov signed a memorandum on 28 November on cooperation in space. (Turan)

MOSCOW HOLDS TALKS WITH LEADERS OF GEORGIAN BREAKAWAY REPUBLICS...

29 November

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov held several meetings on 27-29 November with Aslan Abashidze, leader of the Adjara Autonomous Republic; Raul Khadjimba, prime minister of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia; and Eduard Kokoyty, president of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, Russian media reported. Ivanov told journalists on 29 November that "one should not see a conspiracy" in the closed-door meetings. It is natural, he said, that these leaders would come and express their concern in the wake of the recent developments in Georgia because of the large number of ethnic Russians living in those regions. (ITAR-TASS)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT URGES OPPOSITION-IN- EXILE TO COME HOME

1 December

Reacting to a meeting of the Turkmen opposition-in-exile that was held in Vienna on 23-24 November, Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov on 28 November called on former high-ranking officials now in exile to return home and face criminal charges, turkmenistan.ru reported on 1 December. Niyazov, who was speaking to a meeting of heads of law enforcement agencies, specifically called on former Deputy Prime Minister Khudaiberdy Orazov, former Turkmen Ambassador to Turkey Nurmukhammed Khanamov, and former Deputy Minister of Agriculture Saparmurat Yklymov – all of whom are now leaders of the opposition in exile -- to return, asserting they are false democrats who have sold out their homeland. Niyazov also criticized the countries that gave them asylum, saying they should return the "terrorists and criminals" to Turkmenistan. At the same meeting, Niyazov removed Security Minister Batyr Busakov, appointing in his place border guards chief Annageldy Gummanov. (turkmenistan.ru)

GEORGIAN LEADER CALLS FOR WRITING OFF ENERGY DEBT TO RUSSIA...

1 December

Acting Georgian President Nino Burdjanadze on 28 November participated with leading Russian politicians in a televised discussion on ORT of Georgian-Russian relations. Asked by Unified Energy Systems (EES) head and Union of Rightist Forces (SPS) co-Chairman Anatolii Chubais whether she agrees that Russia should play a larger role in Georgian affairs, Burdjanadze said that, in view of the difficult economic situation

in Georgia, Russia could help by writing off Georgian debts for energy supplies. Chubais responded that there can be no talk of writing off debts, but he would consider restructuring or rescheduling them. (RFE/RL)

OVER 400 CHECHEN RESIDENTS DECLARED MISSING IN 2003

1 December

More than 400 residents of Chechnya have been declared missing in 2003, Deputy Prime Minister Movsur Khamidov told Interfax on Monday. "Over 400 residents have been abducted or declared missing in the Chechen Republic since the beginning of the year," he said. Khamidov, who is in charge of law-enforcement departments, said that the rate of abductions in Chechnya had been reducing. "The rate is on the decline as a result of rapid reactions. Chechen President [Akhmad Kadyrov] has given a great deal of attention to solving this problem, and the republican interior ministry has become more efficient," he said. However, prosecutors could have investigated abductions of Chechen residents more efficiently, Khamidov said. "There have been changes for the better in the prosecutors' investigation of abductions, but, alas, these changes are minor. The situation is nevertheless improving though," he said. All vehicles in Chechnya, both civilian and military, must have license plates in order to help contain abductions, Khamidov noted. "Vehicles without license plates are one of the main problems in the republic. A total of 374 vehicles without license plates but with tinted windows have been detained in the past ten days alone. The problem of military vehicles without license plates and insignia should be solved as well, and we will consider a solution together with the military command," he said. "The republic has law-enforcement departments capable of providing for order and security and fighting against criminals and terrorism. There are ordinances, directives and instructions for doing that. We must make it so that they begin functioning as one and the same mechanism," Khamidov said. (Interfax)

TERRORIST CAMP DESTROYED IN CHECHNYA

1 December

A terrorist camp under construction has been destroyed in the Vedeno district of Chechnya, people in the headquarters of the Joint Group of Forces in the North Caucasus reported on Monday. "On Sunday, units of temporary operation forces of the Russian Interior Ministry and reconnaissance units located the terrorist camp one kilometre from the Shamil-Khutor village and destroyed it. The camp consisted of two incomplete dug-outs and six tents," the source said. Several notepads with radio call-signs, maps of mine fields, explosive manufacturing manuals, an adapter, a charger for a Kenwood transmitter, 18 rounds for grenade launchers, 13 grenades for booby traps, and hundreds of shells were seized at the camp. A search for the terrorists from the base is being conducted. (RIA-Novosti)

AZERBAIJANI INTELLIGENTSIA OFFERS TO MEDIATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN AUTHORITIES, OPPOSITION

1 December

Amal, an organization that represents the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, released a statement on 1 December calling for a

dialogue between the Azerbaijani authorities and the political parties Amal considers the "true" opposition. Those parties are Musavat, the progressive and conservative wings of the divided Azerbaijan Popular Front Party, and the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan. Amal expressed readiness to mediate in such a dialogue. The organization also called on the Azerbaijani authorities to release the approximately 100 persons detained in connection with the post-election unrest, to end reprisals against opposition parties, and to implement all recommendations by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on promoting democratization. (Turan)

ACTING GEORGIAN PRESIDENT SLAMS MOSCOW TALKS WITH REGIONAL LEADERS

1 December

Speaking on 1 December at Maastricht at an OSCE foreign ministers' meeting, Nino Burdjanadze said that the talks that began last week in Moscow between senior Russian officials and the leaders of Georgia's autonomous and breakaway republics fuel confrontation and undermine Georgia's territorial integrity. At the same time, she praised Russia's role in expediting the 23 November resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze and affirmed Georgia's readiness to begin a new phase of relations with Moscow. Burdjanadze and Georgian Foreign Minister Tedo Djaparidze met for 40 minutes on the sidelines of the meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who dismissed Burdjanadze's concern over the Moscow talks as unfounded, Interfax reported. Burdjanadze also said on 1 December that the international community has pledged 5.3 million euros (\$6.4 million) to help fund the extraordinary presidential election on 4 January and the parliamentary ballot, which she said will probably be held a month or two later. (Reuters)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION MOVEMENT TO SET UP FULL-FLEDGED PARTY

1 December

Asylbek Kozhakhmetov, a leader of the opposition Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK) movement, told a news conference on 1 December that the DVK political council has decided to transform the movement into a full-fledged political party reported. Kozhakhmetov heads the organizing group for the new party, which he said would be called the People's Party-Democratic Choice Of Kazakhstan. The party's platform will include replacing the current presidential system with a parliamentary one, expanding the number of members of parliament, election of half of the members of parliament according to party lists, and election rather than appointment of local-government organs. The party will also seek revision of the electoral system and the protection of media freedom. The DVK movement was formed in late 2001. It reportedly now has about 32,000 members throughout the country and has tried several times without success to register with the authorities. (gazeta.kz)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT SIGNS LAW ON OIL-EXPORT TAX

1 December

Nursultan Nazarbaev has signed a law amending tax legislation introducing an export tax on oil, the presidential press service reported. The Kazakh Parliament adopted the law on 27 November. The sections concerning oil exports will come into

force on 1 January 2004. From that date, the taxes are to be paid by all oil exporters except those working under production-sharing agreements and those whose contracts predate the new law. The tax rate will be based on the current market price of oil, up to 33 percent on a price of \$40 or more per barrel. Previously oil exports were untaxed, to the annoyance of many parliamentarians who felt the country's oil wealth was almost being given away. (Interfax)

EUROPE PLANS LARGE EXPENDITURES IN KYRGYZSTAN IN NEXT THREE YEARS

2 December

European agencies plan to spend more than 13 million euros (\$15.5 million) in Kyrgyzstan's Batken Oblast, the poorest in the country, over the next three years and 900,000 euros in Issyk-Kul Oblast. The funding is to be spent on the reduction of poverty and general development programs, with particular emphasis on training officials and the public how to monitor expenditures. Activists of local NGOs involved in development work have commented that European aid money would be better spent on social and economic development in rural areas, although the European Union has already committed 9 million euros to rural development and the World Bank is contributing \$15 million, with an additional \$15 million earmarked for grants to small towns. (KyrgyzInfor)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL WANTS IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH ARMENIA

2 December

In an interview with Armenian Public Television on 30 November, National Movement leader Mikhail Saakashvili said that after the 4 January presidential election -- which he is confident of winning -- a new government will be formed comprising young ministers and representatives of Georgia's minorities. There are an estimated 400,000 Armenians in Georgia. Saakashvili pledged to improve relations with Armenia, which he termed Georgia's main strategic partner. Bilateral relations have been clouded by Georgia's refusal in September to repay a \$20 million debt to Armenia. Saakashvili said rail tariffs for Armenian goods transiting Georgia will be reduced. He blamed the current high tariffs on favors granted by former

President Shevardnadze to the head of Georgian railways. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIA SENTENCES SIX FOR MURDERS IN PARLIAMENT

2 December

Armenia sentenced six men to life imprisonment on Tuesday for their roles in breaking into the former Soviet state's parliament in 1999 and gunning down the prime minister, the chamber's speaker and other officials. A regional court handed down the sentences more than four years after Armenia buried the officials, some of whom were said to be more influential than the president himself. A seventh man, accused of being the killers' driver after being caught with weapons in his car outside parliament, was sentenced to 14 years. The men could appeal their sentences. The gunmen were led by Nairi Unanyan, a former member of the nationalist Dashnak party. He had expressed hopes of staging a coup in the Caucasus country of 3.8 million, accusing the leadership of misleading the nation. Shortly afterwards Armenian President Robert Kocharyan moved to consolidate power by firing top ministers amid fears of plots against him. (Reuters)

RUSSIA SLAMS BRITAIN OVER CHECHEN REBEL'S ASYLUM

2 December

Russia slammed Britain on Monday for granting asylum to leading Chechen rebel Akhmed Zakayev, arguing that the move raised doubt about the British government's commitment to the fight against terrorism. "The granting of asylum status to Akhmed Zakayev not so much causes dismay or regret on our part as it raises doubt on our part as to the sincerity of statements and declarations made by the British leadership in relation to counter-terrorism," Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov told a news conference at NATO. Zakayev -- who said he feared he would be killed if he returned to Russia -- sought asylum within days of arriving in Britain a year ago and on Saturday the British government said his request had been granted. Moscow accuses Zakayev of murder and kidnapping incidents dating from the first of two wars in the breakaway Russian region from 1994-96. (KPЖ)

