

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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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.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what author's write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1000-1200 word analytical article must offer a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, The Analyst does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

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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: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

KEY ISSUE: A short 100-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 300-400 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-400 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. 700-800 words.

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

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INDIA'S ENERGY OFFENSIVE IN CENTRAL ASIA

Stephen Blank

India's engagement with Central Asia goes back centuries. But more recently, since 2000, New Delhi has significantly intensified its overall strategic, military, political, and economic exposure in Central Asia. Indian diplomacy and policy have been particularly active recently with regard to energy. Indian officials from Singh on down clearly articulate their sense of the strategic importance of reliable energy supplies to India. There is no doubt that India's rising dependence upon imported oil and gas to fuel its rapid economic growth and the competition with China underlie this expansion of its profile in Central Asia. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made clear that India cannot afford to be complacent in the face of China's global campaign (including in Central Asia) for secure energy supplies.

BACKGROUND: Manmohan Singh told the Financial Times that "energy security is second only in our scheme of things to food security." Thus India's dependence upon secure oil and gas supplies represents a vital national interest, as manifested in its energy firms' quest for equity holdings in Russian, Angolan, Sudanese, Venezuelan, and, most of all, Iranian energy fields, or for major deals with states like Iran. Accordingly, in November 2004, India's state-run oil corporation announced a \$3 billion deal with Iran's Petropars. At the December 3-4, 2004, summit with Russia, India announced a \$3 Billion Indian investment in the Sakhalin-3 oil field and the joint Russian-Kazakh Kurmangazy oil field in the Caspian. India's Energy Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar has stated that, "what I am talking about is the strategic alliance with Russia in energy security, which is becoming for India at least as important as our national security."

Indeed, India's quest for energy is a driving factor in its foreign policy to such a degree that it agreed to have the national oil and gas company ONGC enter what was a transparent dummy bid for the remnants of Yukos in Russia. Presumably this favor will lead to enhanced access to Russian energy and heightened cooperation with Russian energy firms. Similarly

India still shows interest in participating in a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan, even though it is reluctant to allow Pakistan to have a hand on its gas or oil supply.

While such statements and policies highlight India's capabilities and ambitions, they also clearly underscore its economic vulnerabilities and the inherent dilemmas of the economic dimension of its ties with the United States. India must balance its dependence upon Iranian and Russian energy with its need for U.S. support.

While India's close ties with Iran have not inhibited the development of a flourishing commercial and military relationship with Israel, those ties could cause trouble with the United States even if Indian officials like Hamid Ansari, a member of the Policy Advisory Group to Foreign Minister S. Natwar Singh stated that, "What is going on with regard to Iran is a complex game – part chess, part poker. But we have done our sums with regard to Iran. It isn't an area where we will be pushed to resolve our position." India's need for energy is driving its foreign policy in many respects, and its officials have begun to consider various pipeline schemes for Iranian and Turkmen gas even to include Pakistan. India is negotiating with Iran to obtain equity access to blocks of Iranian oil and

gas and to build a series of oil and gas pipelines. These potential projects include gas pipelines from Iran to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and then India, and a second one from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan, Pakistan and then to India. This last pipeline, the so called TAP line denoting the three states besides India, represents an attempt to revive a proposal that was discussed in the mid-1990s only to fall apart after the advent of the Taliban. While security issues involving Pakistan are obviously a deterrent, so are the complex economic issues that must be resolved, the strategic payoffs could be immense. Apart from relieving pressure upon Indian energy supplies, such pipelines could help Afghanistan recover economically, reduce tensions between Pakistan and India, and give Turkmenistan valuable outlets for its gas that are not dependent upon Russia.

IMPLICATIONS: Completion of these oil and gas deals with Iran would also enhance the already positive ties between new Delhi and Tehran and create a stronger community of interest between those two governments.

But beyond India's ties with Iran, Turkmenistan, and its growing energy investments in Russia proper, India is also active in Kazakhstan. It has formally bid for immediate participation in the Tengiz and Kashagan oil fields and the Kurmangazy and Darkhan exploration blocks. India is also interested in nine other exploration blocks in and around the Caspian sea. Aiyar also offered the services of India's Gail Ltd, a gas infrastructure firm, as a project consortium partner in Kazakhstan's three pipelines with China. Gail is also eager to invest in gas processing and petrochemical plants in association with other Indian public sector companies in the Kazakh towns of Atyrau and Aktau and to improve oil recovery in older fields in Kazakhstan. In order to promote this comprehensive plan of Indian participation in all aspects of Kazakhstan's oil and gas projects, a Joint Working Group was established.

India's new drive for secure sources of energy in Central Asia and around the globe is based not only on its own needs but also on fears that China might be cornering the remaining markets that are not already captured. This India

cannot allow if it is to be able to compete with China.

India and China look to Central Asia for reasons of internal security against Islamic extremism, energy access, economic opportunities, and defense against foreign

threats. They also see it as a place where they can expand what they believe is their growing power in world affairs. Both states believe that the future is theirs, that they already are or should be regarded as great powers and that the future or ideal state of world politics is one of multipolarity or polycentrism where they are each one of those centers or poles. Furthermore both states are now energy importers.

Their increasingly visible competition in the global energy markets also betrays their common ambivalence about relying on market mechanisms even as they find themselves obliged to do so. On the one hand, both states appear to be moving from an approach that emphasized security of supply to one that spreads supply risks through greater reliance on market mechanisms and diversification. They also are moving towards greater reliance on liquid natural gas, two factors that will stimulate investment in capital intensive projects in Central Asia and elsewhere, greater interest in preventing interruptions of seaborne energy trade, and in the restructuring of their formerly state owned oil and gas companies. Accordingly, both states now tend to focus on exploiting short-term advantages to lock in, if possible, overall lower cost delivery over the long-term. However, on the other hand, both states remain suspicious of the market mechanism's effectiveness and viability with regard to securing reliable access to raw materials.

CONCLUSIONS: Stability in the energy market assumes a stable Middle East, a highly questionable assumption. If problems in the Middle East, in the bilateral Sino-Indian relationship, or with the United States preclude the Middle Eastern option, Indo-Chinese rivalry over Central Asia will grow. Thus it is still unclear whether or not this shared approach that seeks to balance mechanisms with maximization of indigenous capabilities will promote greater amity or greater rivalry among them generally and in Central Asia in particular. To a significant degree, the outcome of their current policies in Central Asia depends on

factors beyond either of these states' control. In other words, the Indo-Chinese competition for energy sources that we now see taking shape will interact profoundly with local developments in Central Asia and no less profoundly shape the future politics and economics of both Central Asia, and Asia more generally.

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represent those of the US Army, Defense Department, or the U.S. Government.

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RUSSIAN ECONOMIC EXPANSION IN THE CAUCASUS: A CHALLENGE FOR GEORGIA

Mamuka Tsereteli

Most of the states of the Black and Caspian Sea region are facing a very serious dilemma: the effective governance of the economy requires the privatization of the state-owned enterprises. At the same time, no Western companies seem immediately interested in investing in those enterprises. But Russian state-owned companies and oligarchic groups associated with the government are capitalizing on high prices of energy and other resources, and using available cash to purchase important assets. Georgia is currently facing high controversy regarding increasing Russian investment.

BACKGROUND: The first major entry by Russian companies into the Georgian economy took place under the earlier Shevardnadze regime. In the summer of 2003, United Energy Systems (UES), a power company majority-owned by the Russian government, purchased Tbilisi electricity distribution company Telasi and the 9th (the only one in working condition) block of the Gardabani Power station from the American AES Corporation. RAO UES also received the right to manage hydroelectric power stations Khrami-1 and Khrami-2, and through its 50 percent of the shares in the Sakrusenergo joint venture, acquired ownership of 50% of all the 500 kw power lines in Georgia. In early March 2005, the Georgian government and UES started negotiations on a new five-year

cooperation plan. The details are still unknown, but it is expected that UES may acquire ownership of other distribution and generation facilities in Georgia.

Developments have accelerated in early 2005. In mid-January, Russia's Vneshtorgbank purchased 51% of the shares of the United Georgian Bank. The major shareholder in Vneshtorgbank is the Government of the Russian Federation. In the end of January 2005, the Georgian government signed a memorandum with Russia's YevrAzHolding, the winner of a tender to buy the Chiaturmanganets (one of the largest manganese concentrate producers in the former Soviet Union and one of western Georgia's biggest enterprises) and the Vartsikhe

hydro cascade for \$132 million. Manganese is one of the most important export commodities for Georgia.

The Russian State natural gas monopoly Gazprom made its first big move into Georgia in 2003, taking over the gas transportation business from Russian-American gas trader Itera, itself affiliated with former Gazprom officials. On July 1, 2003 the Georgian government and Gazprom signed a memorandum on strategic cooperation for 25 years. The agreement envisaged the supply of natural gas to Georgian customers and the rehabilitation of gas pipelines, a task that Gazprom never performed. In January 2005, Gazprom announced its interest in privatizing Georgia's gas pipeline system. The Georgian gas pipeline system include pipes which distribute gas in Georgia's regions and pipelines which are used for transporting gas from Russia to Georgia and Armenia.

IMPLICATIONS: With Russian state-owned companies expanding into Georgia, the Russian Federation is acquiring greater leverage over sensitive political issues. This is not only a perceived, but a real threat. The Russian government has a recorded history of using energy dependence as a tool for the political pressure. That was the case in the Baltics, when Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania demanded the withdrawal of Russian troops in 1992. That was the case in Ukraine, where pressure was used for economic reasons. That was the case in Georgia in 2000-2001, when Moscow demanded support for the war in Chechnya and adjustments in Georgia's western-oriented foreign policy.

With Russian state-owned companies in charge of most of the natural gas market, both commercial (power plants, chemical factories) and residential, it is hard to believe that Georgia will have a chance to diversify its natural gas supplies, despite the construction of the U.S. government-backed Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline, which is planned to ship gas from the Shah-Deniz Field in Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia.

In addition, the sale of the gas pipelines is not really a matter of privatization, since Gazprom is a government-owned, poorly managed, and financially not very sound company. Gazprom cannot bring effective management or modern technology. Quote to the contrary, Gazprom, as well as other Russian state-owned companies, bring an old Soviet-style authoritarian management culture. In addition, Gazprom's future is itself not clear. The company does not have money to invest in exploration, and the company is heavily dependent on gas from Turkmenistan and other Central Asian countries in its future strategies. Gazprom capitalizes on these countries' lack of access to markets and uses its monopoly on gas pipelines to set a minimal purchase price. But Turkmenistan is giving Gazprom hard times, not fulfilling some of its earlier contractual obligations and demanding higher prices, thus casting doubts on the success of Gazprom's announced strategy.

This uncertainty surrounding Gazprom is a challenge to Europe as well. Europe is heavily dependent on Russian gas. The dependence varies from twenty-two percent of consumption in France, to almost forty percent in Germany, sixty in Turkey, sixty-five in Austria, seventy-nine in the Czech Republic, ninety-seven in Bulgaria, and a hundred percent in Slovakia, to name a few. The European market is growing rapidly and Russia may lose its share unless it increases its reserves and potential. Europe is already beginning to wake up and look for all possible directions, including the Caspian.

In this context, Gazprom sees the potential for competition and tries to attract all the regional gas in its system. Gazprom is not only after Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, but after Azerbaijan as well. The purchase of the existing Georgian pipeline system is a step in that direction. It gives Russia the opportunity to consider different scenarios of shipping Azerbaijani and Iranian gas from the South Caucasus through its own system to markets in Europe. If successful, Gazprom could make all those producing countries depend on its transportation system and would dictate

commercial considerations. It could also maintain greater leverage on European consumer countries.

CONCLUSIONS: It is in Georgia's interest to avoid a transfer of all of its energy assets to government-owned monopolies of the Russian Federation, in contrast to private Russian investments that should be welcomed in various industries, particularly in tourism, real estate, hospitality business, wine industry etc. On the other hand, the government of Georgia needs to find a way to attract investments from different parts of the world. That will require a clear long-term economic strategy, simplification of regulations, transparency in the privatization process, and

respect and enforcement of property rights by an independent judiciary. It will also require the support of friendly governments. Georgia still cannot afford large-scale investments in infrastructure, and will require assistance in that direction. The energy sector remains the priority, although road infrastructure has an important role as well.

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PAKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN: LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

Hooman Peimani

Pakistan and Uzbekistan signed an agreement on 6 March 2005 to fight against terrorism. Signed by Pakistani President Parviz Musharraf during his two-day visit to Tashkent, the agreement provided for preventing the activities of anti-Uzbek government "terrorists," while the Pakistani president talked about the necessity of an extradition treaty between the two countries. The Uzbek government has blamed Pakistani-based Uzbek terrorists for a series of suicide attacks in its country in 2004. Apart from the agreement's direct security implications for Uzbekistan, it indicates Islamabad's efforts to play a more active role as a regional power in Central Asia especially in the field of regional security, a point evident in President Musharraf expression of interest for his country's joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

BACKGROUND: As a regional power, Pakistan has sought to increase its presence in the Central Asian countries since their independence in 1991. This policy has reflected certain Pakistani objectives, i.e., economic gains, political influence and denying rapid expansion to Islamabad's arch

enemy, India. Although it established diplomatic relations with all the Central Asian states in the early 1990s, Pakistan failed to turn itself into a major player in Central Asia in that decade for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it did not have the resources to address the extensive financial needs of the Central

Asians. Secondly, it did not have the needed advanced technology in many fields, especially high technology. Thirdly, it did not have the expertise and resources to help develop the oil and natural gas resources on which Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were planning to base their economic development. Fourthly, and directly related to the latter, its lacking a common border with Central Asia precluded its bid to offer a serious route for landlocked Central Asia's main exports, namely oil, natural gas and cotton, despite its indirect land link with Central Asia via Afghanistan and notwithstanding of its offering access to open seas. The seemingly endless civil war in Afghanistan made any major economic transaction through that country with or via Pakistan unwise and practically impossible for the Central Asian states.

Apart from its objective of achieving a strong and long-term presence in Afghanistan, Islamabad's direct role in the Taliban's emergence in 1994 and its backing of that group's efforts to dominate the country aimed at stabilizing Afghanistan on Pakistan's terms. Moreover, it sought to ensure Kabul's friendly ties with Islamabad as a means to secure access to Central Asia. However, Pakistan's identification with the Taliban whose northward expansion was a threat to the Central Asian states' security made the latter reluctant in having extensive relations with Pakistan. A negative mood was prevalent in Central Asia regarding Pakistan until the Taliban's fall in November 1991.

IMPLICATIONS: The removal of the Taliban removed a major barrier to Pakistan's relations with Central Asia, but it did not automatically end the mistrust that had accumulated. Certain factors kept the regional states suspicious of Pakistan to this date. Apart from the Taliban's ties with the Central Asian extremist/fundamentalist groups that remain fresh in minds, these included the leeway enjoyed by Pakistani fundamentalist groups and tribes believed to assist the Taliban in their fights to regain power in Kabul, and their support for likeminded groups from Central Asia. They also included the perceived continued support of the Taliban by the Pakistani secret service, the Inter-

Services Intelligence, and Pakistan's alleged tolerance of the Taliban's presence in its two provinces neighboring Afghanistan.

While tensions in Pakistan's ties with the Central Asian states have reduced since the Taliban's fall, relations remain far from close and cordial. This notwithstanding improving economic relations and educational ties. The prevailing suspicion in Central Asia aside, the continued instability in Afghanistan is still a major factor in limiting bilateral economic relations, while preventing the Central Asians from using Pakistan as a reliable major route for their international trade, including oil, gas and cotton exports. Signed in May 2002, the Turkmenistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project for exporting Turkmenistan's natural gas via Afghanistan and Pakistan has remained on paper for that reason.

Apart from instability in Afghanistan, Pakistan needs to address security concerns in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the three regional countries most affected by armed fundamentalist groups with real or perceived ties with the Taliban and their Pakistani mentors. Being the main victim of such groups, Uzbekistan experienced a very devastating year in 2004 as over 50 people were killed as a result of suicide bombings attributed by the Uzbek authorities to the fundamentalist Uzbek groups based in Pakistan.

Against this background, a major reason for President Musharraf's March 2005 visit to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was to deal with his counterparts' security grievances. The 6 March 2005 anti-terrorist agreement between Uzbekistan and Pakistan is a step towards removing Uzbekistan's security concerns that negatively affect its ties with Pakistan. If fully implemented, an end to Uzbek extremist groups' presence in Pakistan and the extradition of their members to Tashkent as hinted by President Musharraf could help Pakistan replace the current suspicious with a more receptive one. That will be a minimum requirement for Pakistan's expressed interest in membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional security

organization in which all Central Asian states excluding Turkmenistan are members.

CONCLUSIONS: Undoubtedly, mending fences is a major objective for Pakistan in Central Asia and a necessity for expanding bilateral relations. This is important to Islamabad both for short-term political and economic gains and in order to help Pakistan consolidate its status as a regional power. Yet such status also requires Islamabad's active involvement in removing destabilizing factors as a prelude to preserving peace and stability in the regions of importance to its long-term interests, especially those in its close proximity. Added to this, despite improving ties with New Delhi, Islamabad is still concerned about expanding Indian influence in Central Asia, another reason why it is keen to

develop a stronger presence in the region. Hence Pakistan's goal and the principal objective of President Musharraf's visit to Uzbekistan is a more active role in Central Asia and particularly its security. However, given the history of mistrust in Central Asia, it takes more than signing agreements to change Central Asian leaders' perceptions. Pakistan's degree of seriousness in uprooting the Pakistani-based Central Asian extremists and their sponsors will be a major determinant for its success in breaking the ice in Central Asia.

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SHIFTING PATTERNS OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN POST-SOVIET UZBEKISTAN

Timur Dadabaev

With a number of "colored" revolutions in Georgia and in Ukraine, the issue of public legitimacy became a central focus point in the political development of other parts of the former Soviet Union, including Central Asia and Uzbekistan in particular. The results of a public opinion survey conducted within the AsiaBarometer project suggest that public opinion in Uzbekistan may slowly be shifting from a model emphasizing government-led step-by-step reform as an engine of economic development towards a model in which liberalization and wider public participation power economic growth and political stability.

BACKGROUND: With independence in 1991, the government in Uzbekistan assumed the leading role in conducting economic and political reforms in the country. Due to this and other factors, the state retained its legitimacy in the eyes of people as an organization providing for their needs. The present poll demonstrated that a majority of those asked remain somewhat confident with the central government (57.7%). Confidence in local government stays above 47.8% but well below the

rate of support for the central government. This fragile but obvious confidence is largely attributed to the (completely or partially) satisfactory performance of the state with respect to public security concerns, which among other include the pacification of inter-ethnic conflicts ("completely" according to 18.3% and "partially" according to 51.1%) and conflicts based on religion conflicts (21.6% and 53.8%).

However, the public still remains concerned about related threats such as terrorism (58.4%), conflict (49.5%), human rights (46.4%), crime (44.3%) and corruption (32.3%). In addition, widely shared public criticism focuses on the central government's failures in economic policies (46.5% partly distrust and 32.8% completely distrust the government), in measures to reduce unemployment (28.6% and 66.2%, respectively), in public services improvement programs (44.1% and 32.7%), in human rights policies (39.2% and 38%) and in measures to eradicate corruption among governmental officials (37.7% and 36.5%).

Therefore, the public trust in the state's capacity to solve these problems is weakening in the light of ever increasing economic problems and the inability of state institutions to appropriately deal with these problems. Disapproval rates (indicated by responses "do not fully trust" and "do not trust at all") are the highest for such state institutions as local government (31.8% and 20.3%), parliament (31.7% and 26.6%), police (31.1% and 31.9%), public healthcare system (31.9% and 23.5%), labor unions (28.2% and 40.2%) and mass media (29.3% and 32.8%).

IMPLICATIONS: In contrast with weak public confidence, over half of those asked (63.2%) participate in national (47.4% "every time" and 15.8% "almost always") and (57.7%) local elections (41.4% and 16.3% respectively). Yet, 82.1% strongly support or subscribe to the view that ordinary people cannot influence political decisions or the actions of government (33% and 49.1% respectively). This kind of attitude is predisposed by the firm belief or supposition (36.4% and 43.1% respectively) among respondents that politicians cease thinking about electorates immediately after their election into parliament. In addition, a majority (85.2%) also strongly supports or agrees with the suggestion that members of government do not pay much attention to what ordinary people think (39.9% "strongly support" and 45.3% "agree with" the statement). More than half (55.3%) of the people surveyed either "strongly believe" (20.1%) or "assume" (35.2%) that their votes in the election do not matter much.

In terms of public expenditures, "increasing" or "significantly increasing" public spending is favored for the fields of public healthcare (49.7% and 37.1% respectively), public education (45% and 34.7%), retirement payments (34.5% and 58.6%), unemployment payments (38.8% and 33.5%) and army and defense expenditures (22.6% and 36.5%). This again reflects a public desire for enforcing a governmental social security package. On the other hand, public expenses aimed at enhancing the implementation of laws, the improvement of public transportation and investment in cultural development do not enjoy strong support.

Public discontent with governmental measures toward the eradication of corruption among governmental officials can be specifically singled out as a point of high concern for respondents. A large portion of respondents consider personal connections (38.4%) and bribing an official (21.6%) to be effective measures to obtain a required document from governmental institutions, if refused by official procedures. Above all, the percentage of people (79.3%) who strongly agree (30.4%) or somewhat agree (48.9%) with the statement that bribery among civil servants is "widespread" is significant. At the same time, there is increasing concern that bribery and informal ties and connections as means to achieve one's goals are becoming a public norm. This process is strongly opposed: for instance, an absolute majority (78.4%) favors appointments to various positions based on merit rather than personal connections.

The desire for wider public participation is another side of weak public confidence in state institutions. Although 75.3% of respondents are "satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their election rights (28.3% "satisfied" and 47% "somewhat satisfied") and 67.9% felt the same way about their right to be elected into governing bodies (16.6% and 51.3% respectively), increasing public pessimism with respect to political participation and enforcement of rights is also observable. A total of 62.5% of respondents felt dissatisfied about their right to organize meetings and demonstrations (31.1% "partially" and 31.4% "completely"); 64.7% felt this

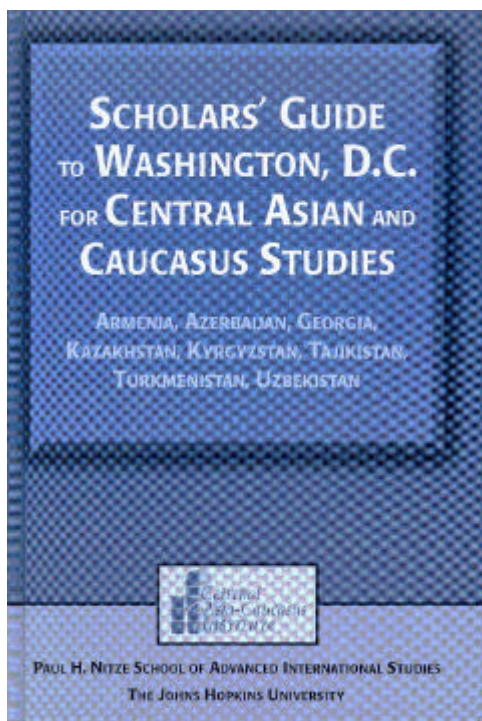
way about their right to free access to information on the work of government (30.5% and 34.2% respectively), 68.6% about the right to criticize the government (27.6% and 51% respectively); and 67.7% felt this way about their right to freedom of speech (26.1% and 41.6% respectively).

Declining public confidence in Uzbekistan leads to further calls, both among the public and the political elite, for reforms of the political system to take into account the voices of ordinary people and their opinions. The majority of those asked rejects the systems in which one leader rules the country without interference by parliament (66.9% reject) or the rule by a military regime (82.1%). A government dominated by bureaucrats and technocrats is also not popular with most people (55.1%), suggesting that such a political system does not suit the realities of present-day Uzbekistan. The majority believes that a democratic system of governance is very suitable (43.9%) or rather preferable (40.1%) for the country.

CONCLUSIONS: Economic growth in Uzbekistan is still seen as the most important objective leading to higher income and a more developed political system. However, the public belief that a strong “developmental” state represented by a strong

executive power can lead to high economic growth and then to democratic reforms may be weakening, as shown in the data on public frustration both with governmental economic policies and with the state of democracy in the country. On the contrary, there is a tendency in responses to support wider public participation in political life, democratic elections, enforcement of individual human rights and eradication of corruption among governmental officials as a path to enhance economic performance and improve lives of people.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Timur Dadabaev is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Oriental Culture (IOC), The University of Tokyo. These findings are the outcome of the AsiaBarometer Project at the IOC, The University of Tokyo conducted in Autumn of 2003 with 800 respondents on 40 questions in 10 Asian countries. For a more comprehensive outlook see the author's "Post-Soviet Realities of Society in Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey* 23:2, 2004, 141-166 and Takashi Inoguchi et.al., eds., *Values and Life Styles in Urban Asia: A Cross-Cultural Analysis and Sourcebook Based on the Asia Barometer Survey of 2003*, Mexico City: SIGLO XXI, 2005.



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FIELD REPORTS

CONSPIRACY THEORIES SURROUND EDITOR'S MURDER IN BAKU

Fariz Ismailzade

The murder of a prominent journalist and editor of the weekly magazine "Monitor" Elmar Huseynov in Baku on March 2 stirred political tensions in the country. A famous critic of the government, Huseynov was shot dead in the evening near his apartment while on his way home from work. The murder was immediately compared to the killings of famous journalists Georgiy Gongadze in Ukraine and Georgi Sanaya in Georgia.

Both the government and the opposition as well as dozens of international media and human rights organizations have condemned the killing, calling for an immediate investigation of the tragedy. Political parties from the entire spectrum of the political arena of the country have met subsequently to discuss the murder and take necessary measures to build a public consensus and avoid the politicization of the issue. Yet this could not prevent the transformation of the funeral of the slain editor into a public protest. Thousands of people turned out to pay their last tribute to Huseynov, shouting anti-government slogans and calling for freedom and democracy.

Huseynov was indeed one of the most prominent and independent media champions in the country, yet he was often criticized for his slandering way of writing. He bashed at both the ruling regime and at the opposition and was fined dozens of times for his articles. The total amount of fines, imposed by the court on the Monitor magazine is said to exceed

\$200,000. In the past, *Monitor* was also closed for short periods of times due to pressure from the government.

Obviously many fingers now point to the authorities. The opposition parties were quick to blame the government in masterminding the attack and trying to kill freedom of speech in the country prior the upcoming parliamentary elections, scheduled for November of this year. Ali Kerimli, the chairman of the opposition Popular Front party even branded the tragic event as "political terror." Indeed, the media in Azerbaijan has been under increasing pressure lately, but it is not a foregone conclusion that the authorities would be interested to eliminate Huseynov, who was known to be a "lone fighter." Subsequently, alternative explanations of the murder have also been offered.

Some independent experts in Baku believe that the murder was organized by outside powers who are interested in disturbing the stability of the country. Without mentioning the names of these powers, these analysts believe that the ongoing economic progress in the country and the recent diplomatic advances made by Baku on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict might have created nervousness among Azerbaijan's enemies. If tied with the recent deaths and bombings in Georgia and Chechnya, it becomes clear that Azerbaijan has much to fear from its powerful regional neighbors.

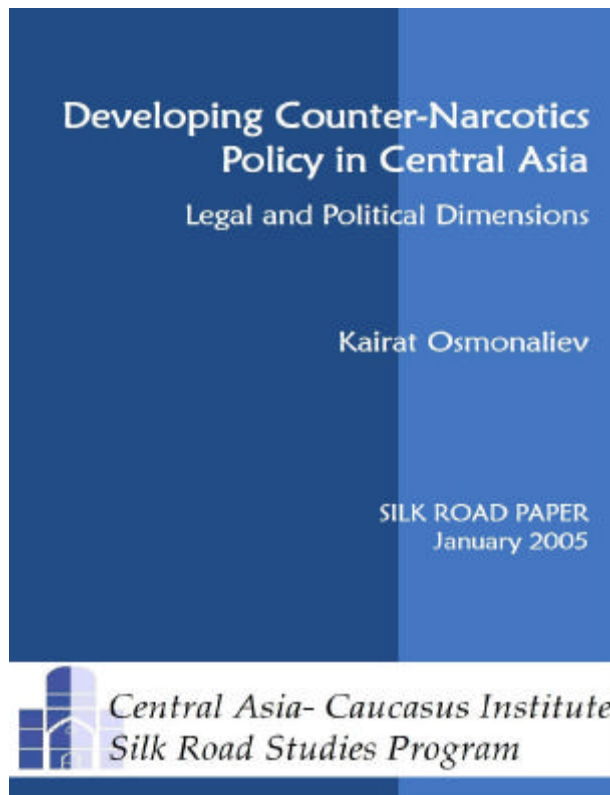
At the same time, the upcoming parliamentary elections are crucial for the country's democratic development and regional stability. Having witnessed a major East-West rivalry in Ukraine and Georgia, Azerbaijanis are afraid that the upcoming elections in the country will push major regional powers into exercising various methods of influence, including terror and military sabotage.

Another popular explanation of Huseynov's murder among Azerbaijani observers is the ongoing rivalry among various groupings within the ruling party. Some believe that the murder was carried out with the express intention to weaken President Aliyev's increasing powers and destabilize the situation in the country in order to avoid much expected and long-awaited cadre changes.

Whatever the true perpetrators behind this murder, it is clear now that Azerbaijan's international image stands to suffer significantly. The head of Azerbaijan's parliamentary delegation to the

Council of Europe Samad Seidov has informed local news agencies that the April session of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly is planning to discuss Azerbaijan's obligations toward this institution and their implementation. European lawmakers are expected to give a hot punch to the Azerbaijani authorities over the journalist's death.

Similarly, Azerbaijan's political stability and subsequently its balanced foreign policy might be at risk. Should foreign powers be identified as the primary organizers of the murder, Azerbaijan's political leadership will be confronted with risky but necessary and tough political decisions which might favor one regional power over another. This, in turn, will further aggravate rivalry in the region and increase the stakes for the upcoming parliamentary elections.



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NAZARBAYEV'S INTEGRATION DRIVE BLOWS WIND INTO MOSCOW'S SAILS

Marat Yermukanov

Launching a call for Central Asian union in his address of the nation delivered on March 18 in Parliament, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev provided rich food for speculations in neighboring countries. He chose emotionally charged words to get across his message to Turkic-speaking brothers who should be "worthy of our common ancestors who would always see us together". Were these words pronounced sincerely, or were they aimed at scoring points on the international scene?

The first skeptical voice about Nazarbayev's goodwill gesture came from an unofficial source. The Russia-based website Ferghana.ru quoted Foreign Ministry officials in Uzbekistan as saying that the Kazakh President's integration initiative meant as much as "another call for show, unfounded and far from reality. The same source said that the integration call was motivated by the necessity "to deflect the attention of the people from regional problems or boost his [Nazarbayev's] image as an active supporter of Central Asian cooperation". It is hard to say whether these comments were really made by some Uzbek officials out of jealousy towards an effective move made by Kazakh President, or was a canard let out by a third party to drive a wedge into the already fragile relationship between the rivaling neighbors.

At any rate, as soon as the Central Asian union concept was put forward, Kazakhstan reaped its first laurels of political success on the international level. Meeting the Kazakh permanent representative to the United Nations Yerzhan Kazykhanov, the Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Kieran Prendergast praised the integration initiative, and particularly the call to set up a single market and common currency in Central Asia as a stabilizing

factor in the region. Kazakhstan was promised UN backing in its integration effort.

The Kazakh leader went further in promoting his image of an ardent advocate of integration and did not miss the opportune moment to win verbal support for his initiative from his Tajik counterpart Imomali Rakhmonov in a telephone conversation on February 23. The Tajik President, however, did not show much enthusiasm for Kazakhstan's Central Asian union scheme and advanced his own proposal of holding an informal discussion of cooperation between heads of Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) member states. For Tajikistan, it seems, the pressing issue of rational use of water resources in the region is more important than a vaguely outlined Central Asian union. Imomali Rakhmonov has good reason to be cautious about Central Asian integration. Nursultan Nazarbayev in his address to the nation specifically named only Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as would-be members of a Central Asian Union which, in his view, should be modeled on the European Union and must be an effective instrument in fighting terrorism, drug and human trafficking, illegal migration and proliferation of conventional weapons in the region. In his message to Nazarbayev, Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev voiced strong support for Central Asian integration. Islom Karimov of Uzbekistan, on his part, cleared away the embarrassment caused by the above-mentioned press reports through a telephone conversation with his Kazakh counterpart to express his formal support for the Central Asian union idea. Demonstrating readiness to mend fences with its neighbors, Uzbekistan announced the completion of landmine-removing operations in the Shohimardon enclave of Kyrgyzstan. In

anticipation of extremist incursions from border areas in springtime, Uzbek security forces resumed discussion of common security measures.

However, all these friendly gestures do not mean a real step towards integration. The only partner of Kazakhstan which attaches due value to Nazarbayev's call for Central Asian union seems to be Russia. Moscow cannot put up with the gloomy prospect of irretrievably losing its former domains in Central Asia. The Kazakh President's call for integration comes at a time when Kremlin is desperately trying to bring back unruly Uzbekistan to its fold, and feels increasingly uncomfortable with Western troops stationed there. In recent years Moscow had to swallow bitter pills of humiliation caused by a series of setbacks. The highly uncertain future of the Single Economic Space (a quartet of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan conceived to develop into a political union) after the Ukrainian orange revolution, added to the headaches of Kremlin. The proposed Central Asian

union to some extent revives the diminished hope of forging a pro-Moscow alliance in the region tied together by common currency and economic infrastructure. Central Asian states would serve as a buffer zone for Russia warding off the threat of military blows from Islamic extremists.

In essence, Kremlin policy-makers merely regard the would-be Central Asian Union as an initial step towards implementing the scheme of a Russian-dominated Eurasian Union in the CIS. The Secretary-General of the Eurasian Economic Community Grigoriy Rapota said that "a regional union of Central Asian states will have a positive impact on the activities of current interstate organizations on the territory of the CIS". Aleksandr Dugin, leader of the Russian Public Movement, commenting on Nazarbayev's integration concept, assessed it as an "irreproachable and timely move, a step towards the strategy of integration into a Eurasian union in the post-Soviet space". No one could be more eloquent.

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN GEORGIA: PROBLEMS REMAIN

Kakha Jibladze

On February 28, the US Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor released the 2004 Human Rights Report. In its commentary on the state of human rights in Georgia, the report commented both on successes and weaknesses, but overall stated that the protection of human rights in the country remains a problem. Human rights violations during arrests, pretrial detentions and due process were highlighted, as well as a trend toward self-censorship in the media.

Aside from human rights violations in law enforcement and the judicial process, the report found that there is a trend of increased self-censorship in the media. In particular, a dispute in November between the Patriarch of the Georgian

Orthodox Church and students at a seminary was mentioned. The incident was initially widely covered by the Georgian media. However, after the president publicly called for the media to be 'more responsible' in its reporting of the incident, the coverage dramatically dropped off. There were complaints of indirect pressure against the media; mass media companies complained that if they covered the government in an unfriendly manner, advertisers pulled their ads, citing government pressure.

While the report gave the Georgian government credit for changes made over the year to combat corruption, there were criticisms that the fight against corruption often ignored human rights. There were also charges against security forces

using brute force to break up peaceful meetings and arrests that did not follow proper due process. According to NGOs, approximately 80% of arrestees are charged with drug or illegal weapon possession. The report mentions that it is common practice to plant drugs and other incriminating material on a suspect during the pre-trial detention. It also made special mention of President Mikheil Saakashvili's policy of allowing those accused of corruption to 'buy' their freedom by paying a 'fine' which went to the state budget. "The Government, in effect, used pretrial detention as a bargaining tactic to induce payment...Government officials, including President Saakashvili, also made public comments that gave the impression they supported police brutality and increased the atmosphere of impunity among police officers. Saakashvili and other government officials later held several press conferences to publicly condemn police brutality."

Police brutality remains a problem. According to Georgian NGOs, including the Liberty Institute and Former Political Prisoners for Human Rights, police currently use pre-trial detention to beat suspects for information that can be used during their trial. At least two men died while under arrest in 2004. The report states that some structures have been put into place to document injuries received during the pre-trial detention, but not enough is being done to punish officers who beat, torture or kill suspects. "During the year, 179 criminal cases against Ministry of Interior employees were opened by the Prosecutor General's Office. All of these cases were pending at year's end. Many observers claimed that prosecutors were frequently reluctant to open a criminal case against police or they closed a case for lack of evidence. Human rights NGOs also believed that many instances of abuse went unreported by victims due to fear of reprisals or lack of confidence in the system."

According to the report, the judicial branch is weak and subject to pressure from both the executive branch and the prosecuting attorney. The report noted that although the constitution guarantees a free and public trial, where it is stated that the accused is innocent until proven guilty, that is not the usual practice. Judges over the past year have been arrested for corruption; in October two judges were arrested for accepting bribes. In February, President Saakashvili named Kote Kublashvili to head the Supreme Court, in an effort, according to the president, to bring in an outsider to make changes.

In the report, the writers also observed that reforms and oversight that is present in the capital is often lacking in the regions outside of Tbilisi.

In the prologue of the human rights report, the authors state that in 2004, despite some improvements, serious problems remain. A recent incident in the southern town of Akhaltsikhe illustrates their concerns. Merab Beridze, the rector of the Tbilisi State University local branch, was arrested on February 16 on charges of corruption. Twelve of the hundreds of students who protested in his defense were arrested on February 18, and one claimed the police beat him while in custody. Police denied allegations of brutality. Georgian NGOs, including the Young Lawyers Association, claimed that the judge involved in the case was being controlled by high ranking government officials, although no one official was ever named. Beridze was eventually released, as were the twelve students, and the charges were dropped. However, no official investigation has been reported to look into the charges leveled against the judge in the case or the allegations of police brutality, despite media reporting that Georgia's Public Defender Sozar Subari and his deputy went to Akhaltsikhe to look into the matter.

PASSPORT CRISIS IN KYRGYZSTAN

Nazgul Baktybekova

Kyrgyz member of Parliament Dooronbek Sadyrbaev recently stated that the country's passport crisis is the blackest mark in the recent history of Kyrgyzstan. "Officials have never made money quite so blatantly on the backs of the Kyrgyz people before". The unclear and knotty situation with the introduction of a new national passport system, which has been dragging for months, has finally burst out and turned into a major political scandal in the country.

The process of introduction of new Kyrgyz passports began almost a year ago with the support of the international community which raised concerns regarding the 1994 passports saying that they were not protected and were easy to forge. The new document is to offer greater protection consistent with international standards and to fight such transnational crimes as human trafficking, international terrorism and organized crime.

In contrast to the current passport, which is filled in by hand, the new passport is designed with the application of the latest technology. In an interview to IRIN, the Program Coordinator of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Kyrgyzstan Bermet Moldobaeva said that the new document has several layers of seal, a special dye, personal data imprinted on laminated covering, a machine-readable code, a digital photographic image of the holder and special paper with watermarks. The International Organization for Migration has been providing technical assistance to the Kyrgyz government in developing the new passport infrastructure in the country.

A tender conducted last year among several companies for the production of new Kyrgyz passports resulted in contracting a Moldovan Company. A specially formed government commission initially claimed that the new

document would be issued in June 2004. However, the issue date was later postponed to September and then to November. "The IOM was concerned that in July 2004, the printing department was ready and the issuing of passports could have started at the beginning of August without any problems", IWPR quotes the IOM Manager of the passport project Michael Chance as saying.

Such a delay, according to unofficial reports, was caused by a long-drawn and vehement strife between certain state structures. Traditionally the Ministry of Internal Affairs was the government body responsible for the issuing of passports, which is widely believed to be a corruption-prone sphere. Under the new regulations and new passport system, a special state entity – the State Agency for Information Resources and Technologies – was formed, which would deal with all the passport-related matters including issuing of passports, whereas the MIA would play a secondary role of assisting the new agency in gathering passport applications. After prolonged battles the MIA has reportedly re-conquered its passport-issuing right. However, no official statement has been made yet and it is still unclear which of these two state structures will be responsible for the passport system.

In December 2004, the new passports were issued, but this event generated additional fury among parliamentarians and more confusion among the population. Kyrgyz parliamentarians claim that the new passports were printed with gross errors. Some say that the main symbol of Kyrgyzstan – the golden eagle – looks like a chicken, others add that this chicken lacks feathers. Angered deputies have formed a parliamentary commission to investigate the circumstances leading up to the crisis and some

have even raised the issue of dismissing government officials for negligence.

Following the on-going debates, the Kyrgyz government headed by Prime-Minister Nikolai Tanaev on 25 January passed a resolution permitting the issuing of newly printed passports to citizens. According to the resolution, passports are issued for one year to citizens who do not have passport, who have all visa pages filled up, who have USSR passports of the 1974 sample or whose passports have expired. Even the issuing of 141,800 newly

printed passports will unlikely solve the situation as today reportedly up to 500,000 persons in Kyrgyzstan need new passports. In the meantime, concerns have been raised over the violation of people's rights and the Constitution. The inability of the government to provide the citizens with the main civil document has deprived them of freedom of movement and, what is more important, preventing thousands of people from casting vote in the coming elections.



NEWS DIGEST

KAZAKH FOREIGN MINISTER DETAILS PRESIDENT'S 'CENTRAL ASIAN UNION' PROPOSAL

23 February

Foreign Minister Qasymzhomart Toqaev told "Kazakhstanskaya pravda" in a 23 February interview that President Nazarbaev's 18 February appeal to form a union of Central Asian states was not a call for the creation of a single state. Toqaev said that Nazarbaev "did not mean the setting up of a 'union state' that would clearly swallow national sovereignty...." Toqaev stressed that what Nazarbaev had in mind is a movement for greater integration based on a free-trade zone, customs union, common market, and currency union. "The experience and principles stipulated in the main documents on setting up the European Union will be used," Toqaev added. (RFE/RL)

THOUSANDS CONTINUE PROTESTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

23 February

Thousands of demonstrators continued to block roads in Kyrgyzstan for the second day on 23 February to protest decisions by regional election commissions to remove opposition candidates from the 27 February parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. In the Tong district, where 2,000 protesters initially surrounded the local administration to protest the removal of candidate Arslan Maliev, demonstrators eventually took over the building, demanding Maliev's reinstatement and the resignation of regional head Nurbek Aliev. In Kochkor district, 5,000 protesters blocked the Bishkek-Torugart highway demanding the reinstatement of candidates Akylbek Japarov and Beishin Bolotbekov and the resignation of Governor Shamshybek Medetbekov. When Kochkor district head Tariel Aitbaev arrived to speak with protesters, the latter forcibly detained him. Moreover, the heads of six rural councils in Kochkor said that they are going over to the side of the protesters. Mass protests also took place in the Tiup and Suzak regions, as well as the city of Jalal-Abad. Demonstrators across the country vowed to continue their protests until officials stop harassing opposition candidates. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA EXTENDS MILITARY SERVICE

24 February

The Georgian parliament voted on 23 February to extend the length of obligatory military service from 12 to 18

months starting in the spring of 2005. The extension, to remain in effect until January 2008, is an element of the country's broader military-reform effort, which includes a sweeping reorganization of the Defense Ministry and is tied to the longer-term strategic plan for closer integration with Western security institutions. (ITAR-TASS)

TAJIK OPPOSITION COMPLAINS OF VIOLATIONS

25 February

Tajik opposition parties stated on 24 February that they continue to face harassment in the final days before 27 February parliamentary elections. Rahmatullo Valiev, deputy head of the Democratic Party, told a news conference on 24 February that the party's television advertisements have been shown with central elements of the party's program removed, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. Rahmatullo Zoirov, leader of the Social Democratic Party, charged that more ballots than there are registered voters have been delivered to a number of districts, raising fears of possible fraud, the BBC's Persian Service reported on 24 February. Central Election Commission officials denied the charges. Also on 24 February, Latif Hadyazoda, head of the Public Center for Election Observation and Monitoring, warned that local election commissions across the country are making efforts to turn out the vote for the ruling People's Democratic Party, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. (RFE/RL)

VIOLATIONS REPORTED IN KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARY POLLS - OPPOSITION

27 February

A Kyrgyz opposition leader said violations have been reported in Sunday's parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan. "Reports have been arriving since the morning about flagrant violations of election regulations and about the use of administrative pressure during the elections and during preparations for the elections," Roza Otunbayeva, leader of the Ata-Zhurt (Fatherland) opposition movement told the press on Sunday. "The elections are unfair and are likely to be followed by a wave of popular protests," Otunbayeva said. The Kyrgyz president's daughter Bermet Akayeva told journalists at a polling station that "vote rigging is impossible in the elections." "The parliamentary elections are proceeding in an open atmosphere. Everything has been done to

demonstrate that free, open and transparent elections are being held in Kyrgyzstan," said Akayeva. (Interfax)

GEORGIAN OPPOSITION PARTY PROTESTS PRESIDENT'S PROPOSED PAY RISE TO CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

28 February

The opposition Labor Party has lodged an appeal with the Constitutional Court against what it terms the "colossal" salary increases proposed for the president and members of the government. Party Secretary Giorgi Gunava argued that it is immoral that the monthly salary of the president and prime minister should be raised from the lari equivalent of \$1,500 to \$2,185 while the minimum monthly wage remains 40 laris (\$22) and the average pension is 28 laris. He called for raising the minimum monthly wage to 150 laris. (Caucasus Press)

U.S. REJECTS REPORTS IT OPPOSES KARABAKH'S RETURN TO BAKU

28 February

U.S. officials made a statement denying assertions that Washington, which one of the mediators working to resolve the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, is against returning Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan. These assertions were made following Armenian media reports which cited U.S. Ambassador John Evans's statements made at a meeting with the Armenian community in Los Angeles. The U.S. ambassador was quoted as saying that although the U.S. respects the territorial integrity of states, everyone understands that giving Karabakh back to Azerbaijan would be a disaster. In the wake of this statement, the U.S. Embassies in Yerevan and Baku on Monday circulated statements saying that Evans's assertions reflected only his personal point of view. (Interfax)

OSCE CALLS TAJIK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS UNDEMOCRATIC

28 February

Election observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) think that the February 27 parliamentary elections in Tajikistan failed to meet democratic standards, mission head Peter Eicher told a Monday press conference in Dushanbe. He said the state's control over the political campaign was too strong, too many governmental officials headed elections commissions, and the authorities interfered in the activities of the independent press. (Interfax)

TAJIK PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS LEGAL - CIS ELECTION OBSERVERS

28 February

The February 27 elections to the lower house of the Tajik parliament were legal, CIS Executive Secretary and head

of the CIS election observing mission Vladimir Rushailo told a Monday press conference in Dushanbe.

"CIS election observers believe the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan complied with national election laws and have declared the elections legal, free and transparent," he said. Rushailo proposed that other election observers, who share this opinion, join in the statement by CIS election observers. (Interfax)

CHERKESSESS CONTINUE TO PROTEST PLANNED MERGER OF ADYGEYA, KRASNODAR KRAI

1 March

The NGO Cherkess Congress has released a statement condemning the publication in the 18-24 February issue of "Komsomolskaya pravda" of the findings of an opinion poll asking residents of Krasnodar Krai and the Republic of Adygeya how they would vote in a referendum on merging those two Russian entities. The Cherkess Congress statement criticized the poll as "destructive" and likely to exacerbate interethnic tensions in Adygeya, where Cherkess make up some 24 percent of the population, and it rejected the argument that it is economically expedient to subsume "impoverished" Adygeya into "wealthy" Krasnodar. It also noted that Krasnodar Krai Governor Aleksandr Tkachev has made discriminatory statements about some of the ethnic groups in the planned megaregion, and that the Krasnodar authorities have a record of oppressing minorities, including Armenians and Meskhetians. The statement further warned that there are 300,000 Cherkess in the North Caucasus and some 3 million dispersed across Eurasia who, the statement claimed, have the right to demand their own republic in the North Caucasus. (RFE/RL)

ATTEMPT MADE ON ABKHAZ PM'S LIFE

1 March

An attempt has been made on the life of Alexander Ankvab, prime minister of the breakaway republic of Abkhazia.

Ankvab emerged uninjured from the incident. Early reports suggest the prime minister's car came under fire outside the village of Achadara at the entrance to Sukhumi on Tuesday morning.

Local television reported that the car was hit by 17 bullets. (Interfax)

U.S. NOTES HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

1 March

In its annual report on human rights world-wide that was released on 28 February, The U.S. State Department registered a worsening of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan in 2004 following the disputed presidential ballot in October 2003. The State Department's annual

report noted that Azerbaijani police failed to investigate four deaths in police custody and numerous complaints of torture and ill-treatment in detention. It said that the judiciary in Azerbaijan remains "corrupt and inefficient" and is strongly influenced by the executive, which generally fails to observe the constitutional prohibition on arbitrary arrest and detention. The report further criticized police harassment of members of religious minorities and restrictions on media freedom, including the government's failure to act on its pledge to create a public television channel. Finally, the report noted that the number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan now exceeds 100, and it expressed concern at pressure on ethnic Armenians to emigrate. (Turan)

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS DIFFER IN ASSESSMENTS OF KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

1 March

International observers from the CIS and OSCE on 28 February offered differing assessments of 27 February parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, agencies reported. Asan Kozhakov, head of the CIS observer mission, noted some irregularities but deemed the elections "transparent, open, and legitimate." But Kimmo Kiljunen, who headed the OSCE observer mission, told a news conference in Bishkek on 28 February that the elections, "while more competitive than previous elections, fell short of OSCE commitments and other international standards in a number of important areas," RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Kiljunen cited such flaws as the "deregistration of candidates, interfering with independent media, vote buying, and a low level of confidence in electoral and judicial institutions on the part of candidates and voters." The CIS observer mission included 218 monitors from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; the OSCE observer mission also consisted of roughly 200 long-term and short-term observers. (RFE/RL)

LAWMAKER SLAMS MARRED BALLOTING IN KYRGYZSTAN, TAJIKISTAN

1 March

US Senator John McCain expressed "outrage" over last week's parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, saying balloting was riddled with irregularities. In both countries, McCain said, "election day was marred by vote buying, de-registration of candidates, and media interference, and followed hyperbolic warnings by officials about the dangers of civil war," he said of the February 27 voting. "I am particularly outraged by the forced shut-down of the only independent printing press in Kyrgyzstan, just four days before the election," he said. "This sort of information

control is reminiscent of the old Soviet days, and simply has no place in a free democracy."

McCain called for greater transparency and adherence to international norms during March 13th's run off balloting. "Kyrgyz officials know that the world is watching, and they should also know that choosing to deny their people the most basic political rights will carry profound implications," the prominent Republican lawmaker said.

International observers included the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), found that Kyrgyzstan's elections fell short of international standards. McCain slammed balloting abuses in Tajikistan as "even worse than in Kyrgyzstan," noting that election observers documented "widespread multiple voting and unrealistically high turnout figures." "These two countries can pretend no longer. The governments in these countries present a false choice -- chaotic democracy or authoritarian stability," McCain said. (AFP)

PRESIDENT-LED PARTY WINS MOST SEATS IN TAJIK PARLIAMENT

1 March

Representatives of the People's Democratic Party led by President Emomali Rakhmonov have won the most seats in the lower house of the Tajik parliament, Central Elections Commission Chairman Mirzoali Boltuyev said on Tuesday. The barrier of 5% needed to be represented in parliament has also been cleared by the Communist Party and the Islamic Revival Party, Boltuyev said. He said representatives of the Democratic Party, Social-Democratic Party and Socialist Party had failed to muster enough votes in the February 27 parliamentary polls. A second round will be held in three electoral districts on March 13. (Interfax)

CHECHNYA OIL INDUSTRY DEVELOPING TOO SLOWLY - PRESIDENT

2 March

Chechen President Alu Alkhanov on Wednesday complained about "clearly insufficient" operations by the Russian oil company Rosneft, the only company producing oil in Chechnya. "We want to develop this sector both qualitatively and quantitatively," Alkhanov told a news conference. "The oil industry accounts for 70% to 80% of the republic's budget," he said. "But geological prospecting is also important for us. To date we use about 100 wells whereas there are about 500 in the republic," Alkhanov said. "By and large, there is a document that governs the operation of the Rosneft petroleum company [in Chechnya]. But since time doesn't stand still, we would like greater progress as regards business projects," Alkhanov said. (Interfax)

BAKU JOURNALIST'S MURDER BLOW AGAINST DEMOCRACY - PRESIDENT

3 March

The murder of Monitor magazine's editor Elmar Guseinov was intended to discredit the country's leadership, said Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. The president said that in conditions of public and political stability, the murder of a journalist in Baku is a serious attack on the state and its leadership and a blow against Azerbaijan's democracy, the presidential press service said on Thursday, following an extraordinary Security Council session. (Interfax-Azerbaijan)

UN PEACE-BUILDING REPRESENTATIVE CONCERNED AT POSTELECTION TENSIONS IN TAJIKISTAN

3 March

Vladimir Sotirov, head of the UN Tajikistan Office of Peace-Building, told Avesta in an interview on 3 March that he is concerned about the tensions that the 27 February parliamentary elections have caused between the government and the opposition. Sotirov noted as a worrisome development the possibility that four opposition parties -- the Communist Party, Islamic Renaissance Party, Democratic Party, and Social Democratic Party -- might withdraw from the Public Council to protest alleged election fraud. "Ceasing dialogue at the level of the Public Council in itself is a dangerous step that threatens the efforts being made by the nation and political parties in the country's post-conflict development," Sotirov said. "We hope that the situation after the elections will not have a negative impact on peace and stability in the country, and that despite all the difficulties, democratic processes, including the rule of law and protection of human rights, will continue to develop in the future," he added. (Avesta)

RUSSIA SLAMS GEORGIAN REQUEST FOR EU BORDER MONITORING

4 March

In response to a request from Interfax, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement expressing "bewilderment" at a request earlier this week by Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili that the EU consider deploying observers to Georgia's borders with Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan. The Russian statement points out that previous monitoring of the border by the OSCE was suspended because it proved ineffective. The statement further characterizes Zourabichvili's request as an attempt to drive a wedge between Russia and the EU, "with which Moscow is linked by close ties of partnership." A press release from the office of EU High Representative for Common

Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana as saying that the EU is holding consultations with all sides in order to best resolve the problem of security on the Georgian-Russian border after the termination of the OSCE border-operation but has not made its final decision yet. The press release also said the EU supports OSCE plans for additional training for Georgian border guards. (RFE/RL)

THOUSANDS MOURN AZERI JOURNALIST

4 March

Thousands of people have attended the funeral of murdered independent reporter Elmar Huseynov in Azerbaijan. Huseynov, widely known for his outspoken criticism of the Azerbaijani authorities, was shot outside his flat in the capital, Baku, on Wednesday. International organizations and foreign governments have condemned the killing. Huseynov's family - echoing a warning from President Ilham Aliyev - had urged the opposition not to turn the funeral into an anti-government rally. But the BBC's Natalia Antelava in Baku says the gathering inside the big hall where the ceremony took place nevertheless resembled a political meeting. Some 3,000 mourners joined the procession through the streets of Baku to the cemetery behind the coffin, which was unusually kept closed. A number of government officials were present at the subsequent funeral meeting, but the crowd jeered one of them who tried to speak until he was forced to leave the room. Police kept out of sight during the procession. Our correspondent says people cheered as opposition leader Ali Kerimli addressed them. Mr Kerimli told the crowds that the government should resign unless it can track down the killers within the next two weeks. "The bullet was aimed at the people of Azerbaijan," he said. "Elmar is a victim of political terror. He became a victim of the truth. They wanted to silence him, but they cannot silence a people. Azerbaijan will be free." Mr Kerimli told the BBC that the opposition planned to hold mass rallies next week. The US ambassador to Azerbaijan also addressed the crowd. He described Huseynov as a national hero. "We hope that people can realise this loss to the nation ... and find ways to protect journalists in Azerbaijan," Reno Harnish said. An FBI agent arrived from the US on Friday to help with the investigation into the journalist's death. (BBC)

EXPLOSION RATTLES KYRGYZ OPPOSITION LEADER'S APARTMENT

4 March

An explosion occurred at the Bishkek apartment of Roza Otunbaeva, co-chairwoman of the opposition Ata-Jurt bloc, in the early morning of 3 March, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. According to Otunbaeva, the blast knocked out windows and damaged the building. It took place on the balcony and caused no injuries, however.

Police later found shrapnel at the scene and suggested that the cause of the explosion was a hand grenade, akipress.org reported. The Interior Ministry and National Security Service are investigating the incident, Kabar news agency reported. Otunbaeva called the blast a scare tactic. The first round of parliamentary elections took place on 27 February and runoffs are scheduled for 13 March. "This bears the imprint, the attitude, of the Kyrgyz government toward the opposition," Otunbaeva said, according to RFE/RL. "Not only the press, but democracy itself is in danger in this country. But we will not give [democracy] up." (RFE/RL)

THIRTY ABDUCTIONS IN CHECHNYA IN 2005 – MEMORIAL

5 March

Thirty people have been abducted in Chechnya in 2005, and 17 of them are still missing, the Memorial human rights center told Interfax. "According to incomplete information, 30 cases of abductions of Chechen residents were recorded in January and February. Ten of these people have been released, 17 are missing, and one was found dead. The two others are currently under investigation," Memorial's Dmitry Grushkin said on Friday. Memorial also found out that 22 Chechen residents were killed in the first two months of 2005, Grushkin said. "Among them are 13 peaceful civilians, 5 members of Chechen law enforcement and security agencies, and one guerilla. The identities of three more people are unknown," Grushkin said. "This data is not complete. Our monitoring embraces only 30% of Chechnya's territory. Even on this 30% of the territory, we can't record all crimes," he said. (Interfax)

SOROS FOUNDATION DENIES FINANCING AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION

5 March

Farda Asadov, who is the head of the Soros Foundation's Baku office, told a press conference in the Azerbaijani capital on 4 March that there is no truth to media reports and speculation that the foundation has provided funding to Azerbaijani opposition parties. Asadov said that in 2004 the foundation provided \$2.8 million in funding for programs to develop civil society in Azerbaijan, and for the education and information sectors. Pro-government parliament deputies recently accused British Petroleum of funding Azerbaijani opposition parties. (zerkalo.az)

PAKISTAN PLEDGES TO FIGHT UZBEK TERRORISTS

6 March

Pakistan's president on Sunday said he would not permit Uzbek extremists to use his nation to launch attacks on Uzbekistan and signaled his readiness to extradite any alleged Uzbek terrorists captured there. Islamic groups

linked to al-Qaida have targeted Uzbekistan, Central Asia's most populous nation, where more than 50 people died in attacks last year. One group, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, is believed to have found shelter in Pakistan's largely lawless border areas. Visiting Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf signed an agreement with Uzbekistan on fighting terrorism. "I have assured President (Islam Karimov) that Pakistan will not allow the use of its soil by any terrorists from Uzbekistan ... and we will act against them," Musharraf said during a visit to the Uzbek capital, Tashkent. Musharraf mentioned the possibility of an extradition treaty between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, and the two leaders also discussed ways to bolster their nations' economic ties and develop transport and communications links. Landlocked Uzbekistan hopes to use Pakistani sea ports as a trade gateway, Karimov said. Pakistan has long planned to build road and rail links with Central Asian states and a pipeline to carry gas from Turkmenistan, but instability in Afghanistan has blocked the projects. Musharraf also expressed interest in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a regional security group that includes Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. (AP)

ADYGEYA LEADER COMES OUT AGAINST MERGER WITH KRASNODAR KRAI

7 March

Khazret Sovmen, president of the Republic of Adygeya, met in Maikop on 5 March with members of the executive committee of the International Cherkess Association, which is campaigning to prevent the merger of the republic with Krasnodar Krai, according to AdygeaNatPress as quoted by Kavkazweb.net on 7 March. Sovmen was quoted as repeating his earlier opposition to any moves that negatively impact on the political situation in the region, and as terming the proposed merger "regressive" and a threat to interethnic relations in an "explosive" region. On 5 March, the International Cherkess Association drafted an appeal to the Russian leadership, circulated by kavkazweb.net on 7 March, asking that the existing law on Russian citizenship be amended to enable Cherkess, Adygs, and Kabardians living outside Russia to acquire Russian citizenship after living in Russia for one year, and without forfeiting their existing citizenship, which would facilitate their settlement in their ancestral homeland. The appeal also requested that Moscow clarify its position with regard to the creation of a mega-region comprising Krasnodar Krai and Adygeya. (RFE/RL)

NATO EXPERTS ARRIVE IN GEORGIA ON INSPECTION MISSION

7 March

Eight NATO experts arrived in Georgia on an inspection

mission on Monday. The NATO mission's goal is to monitor the implementation of the Georgia-NATO individual partnership program, the Georgian Foreign Ministry reported. The program is intended to help carry out political, economic and military reforms in compliance with NATO standards. Georgia announced that it plans to join NATO at the alliances Prague summit in 2002. The individual partnership program began in October 2004. (Interfax)

CITIZENS SEIZE KYRGYZ DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

7 March

About 700 people have seized the Uzgen district administration building in southern Kyrgyzstan, demanding fair parliamentary elections, local media reported. A preliminary report suggests the administration chief and all officials have left the building. Sources in the Osh region police department confirmed the building's seizure, but put the number of action participants at about 300. The building is believed to have been seized in protest against the authorities' handling of the first round of parliamentary elections on February 27. The second round is scheduled for March 14. (Interfax)

NO NEED FOR STATE OF EMERGENCY IN KYRGYZSTAN - PRESS SECRETARY

7 March

The Kyrgyz presidential press secretary Abdil Segizbayev said he sees no need to declare a state of emergency. "Nobody is going to declare a state of emergency in Kyrgyzstan. There are no prerequisites for it," Segizbayev said on Monday, commenting on the opposition rallies taking place in southern Kyrgyzstan. "On the whole, the situation in the republic remains calm. Any rallies that are held in compliance with the constitution are not prohibited," the press secretary said. He denied reports that "extra law enforcement units have been sent to Dzhahalal-Abad" in the country's south. "The Prosecutor General's Office and law enforcement agencies will make appropriate decisions following the seizure of the Dzhahalal-Abad regional administration building," Segizbayev said. Of the 1,000 participants in the Dzhahalal-Abad rally, 250 are family members of the action's organizers, he said. Some people have been paid for their participation in the rally, he said. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the opposition have criticized the authorities' handling of the February 27 first round of parliamentary elections. Some opposition members have called for early presidential elections and a re-run of the parliamentary elections' first round. Segizbayev said he does not see any reason to re-consider the date for the second round. (Interfax)

CHECHEN LEADER MASKHADOV KILLED

8 March

Russian forces say Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov has been killed. Russian television showed pictures of a body resembling that of Mr Maskhadov, 53, in a pool of blood in Chechnya. President Vladimir Putin has asked for further identification. However, Mr Maskhadov's envoy in London, Akhmed Zakayev, later confirmed the death. Mr Zakayev said resistance in Chechnya would continue despite the death of Mr Maskhadov, seen as the most moderate of Chechnya's rebel commanders. Few details have been released of the Russian operation at the settlement of Tolstoy-Yurt, near the Chechen capital, Grozny. Gen Ilya Shabalkin, a spokesman for Russian forces in the Caucasus region, earlier told news agencies that Mr Maskhadov's body had been found in a bunker. But it was not clear whether he had been killed by Russian forces. Chechnya's Moscow-appointed Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov told Interfax news agency the intention had been to take Mr Maskhadov alive, but he had been killed as a result of his bodyguards' carelessness in handling their weapons. "Carry out additional identification tests, report back," Mr Putin ordered. "If this information is confirmed, grant state awards to all those involved in the operation," the Russian leader said. "We have to gather our forces to protect the people of the republic and citizens of all Russia from the bandits," Mr Putin said. Russian also television showed pictures of a grey-bearded and shirtless corpse in a pool of blood. (BBC)

GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT TO SET DEADLINE FOR RUSSIAN BASE TALKS

9 March

The draft statement on Russian military bases in Georgia that parliament will issue was not radically amended during debates on Wednesday, said one of the draft's authors, Legal Committee deputy chief Giga Bokeria. "The statement says that if no agreement with Russia on deadlines for withdrawing the bases is reached by May 15, they will be outlawed," Bokeria said. May 15 is the deadline the Georgian and Russian Foreign Ministries earlier set for completing negotiations on the future of the military bases, he said. (Interfax)

PUTIN SIGNS SECURITY AGREEMENTS WITH KAZAKHSTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN

9 March

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed the federal law "On ratification of the agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan on joint military planning in the common security interests of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan," said the press service of the Russian president. The agreement allows fuller realization of the

provisions of the agreement between Russia and Kazakhstan on military cooperation as of March 28, 1994 to provide security of the two countries and to expand cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries. The agreement provides regional security, above all, for Central Asian nations, the supplement to the law reads. Putin also signed the federal law on the ratification of the agreement between Russia and Kyrgyzstan on cooperation in the security area, the president's press service reports. The document provides more effective solution to the issues dealing with national security in the military, economic, and environmental spheres, and also with protection of the Russian state border, and the fight against international terrorism. (RIA-Novosti)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION GROUPS FORM ELECTION ALLIANCE

9 March

Kazakhstan's troubled opposition groups said Wednesday they would form an alliance for upcoming elections in a bid to unseat President Nursultan Nazarbayev. "We are uniting to put an end to the uncontrolled and irresponsible rule of the current regime," said Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, one of the leaders of the new alliance, For Fair Kazakhstan.

Tuyakbai said by the end of March the alliance would announce a single opposition candidate to run against Nazarbayev in the December elections. The move comes after authorities in January banned the Democratic Choice party for alleged extremism. Democratic Choice and Ak Zhol are Kazakhstan's main opposition groups.

The developments raised doubts about the opposition's ability to unite ahead of the presidential race. Nazarbayev, a former Communist boss, has been in power since in 1989 and holds extensive powers. He has said he will seek another seven-year term. The opposition blames Nazarbayev for allowing widespread corruption, lack of political reforms and unfair distribution of the country's huge revenues from energy exports. But Nazarbayev is also widely credited for the country's considerable economic progress after the Soviet collapse. (AP)

OSH, KYRGYZSTAN READY TO INTRODUCE STATE OF EMERGENCY

March 9

The mayor's office of Osh, Kyrgyzstan's second-largest city, is ready to introduce a state of emergency due to an unsanctioned protest organized by the opposition on the city's central square, Osh Mayor Satyvaldy Chyrmashev told a press conference on Wednesday. "The city's authorities are ready to do everything necessary to preserve calm among Osh's 500,000 citizens," Chyrmashev said. The city's authorities are currently negotiating with the rally organizers, Chyrmashev said. "We are ready to provide transportation to all citizens of other cities so that they can get home safely," Chyrmashev said. Approximately 400 people gathered on Osh's central square, demanding the government's dismissal and new parliamentary elections. Police surrounded the regional administration building to keep the protestors outside. (Interfax)

