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Contents

Analytical Articles

THE BLUE STREAM PIPELINE AND GEOPOLITICS OF NATURAL GAS IN EURASIA 3
Mamuka Tsereteli

AZERBAIJAN'S POST-ELECTION SITUATION: A LOSE-LOSE SITUATION 6
Alman Mir-Ismaïl

VESTED INTERESTS TO DETERMINE KAZAKHSTAN'S PRESIDENTIAL RACE 8
Ustina Markus, Nigmat Ibadildin and Ryan Kennedy

RUSSIA REALIZES ITS CARTEL 10
Stephen Blank

Field Reports

GEORGIAN DEFENSE REFORMS: ELIMINATING ABUSE REMAINS PRIORITY 12
Kakha Jibladze

LOOKING BACK: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN TAJIKISTAN 13
Bakhtiyor Naimov

**KAZAKH AUTHORITIES FEAR PUBLIC DISTURBANCES
AFTER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS** 15
Marat Yermukanov

ASGHGABAT, NOVEMBER 25, 2002: WHO LOST, WHO WON? 17
Muhammad Tahir

News Digest 19

EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The Central Asia-Caucasus 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: 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.

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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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THE BLUE STREAM PIPELINE AND GEOPOLITICS OF NATURAL GAS IN EURASIA

Mamuka Tsereteli

The inauguration of a \$3.2 billion natural gas pipeline connecting Russia to the northern Turkish city of Samsun is a sign of Russia's growing economic influence in Turkey. It is also another proactive step on Gazprom's part to prevent other players from entry into the Turkish, and more importantly, the European natural gas markets, since Turkey is a natural hub for Caspian and Iranian gas destined for Europe. This development is confronting the European Union directive on diversification of energy supplies to Europe. On the other hand, it motivates the Eastern European countries, who were counting on alternative sources for the diversification of their natural gas supplies, to search for new opportunities to acquire Caspian gas.

BACKGROUND: The Blue Stream pipeline is the world's deepest undersea pipeline, stretching from southern Russia under the Black Sea to the Durusu Metering Station, a gas terminal outside the port city of Samsun. The gas pipeline is scheduled to deliver 6 bcm per year in 2006, and to reach its full capacity of 16 bcm by 2010. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Turkey's Black Sea coast for the inauguration ceremony. Russia already supplies 60 percent of Turkey's natural gas and 20 percent of its oil, and with this pipeline operating in full capacity, the share of Russian gas will increase further. Italy's Eni SpA was a key partner in the construction of the pipeline, and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi also attended the ceremony. In addition to Turkey, Russia aims to supply gas to Italy via Turkey and Greece. At the inauguration ceremony, President Putin underlined the possibility of additional pipelines to be built across the Black Sea bed to supply gas to southern Italy, southern Europe, and Israel.

Currently several major pipelines supply Europe with the natural gas from Eurasia. The Brotherhood pipeline, connecting Russia, Ukraine and Slovakia can transport up to 100 bcm to Western Europe and accounts for almost 25% of gas supply for the region. The other line bringing gas from Russia to Europe is the trans-Balkan line, running from Russia via Ukraine to Bulgaria, and has an annual capacity of 18-20 bcm. From Bulgaria, the Southern branch supplies Greece, and the Eastern branch, Turkey. The Trans-Balkan covers the vast majority of Southeastern Europe's gas

imports. In addition to the Blue Stream pipeline, Gazprom is about to complete the construction of the first (out of two) trunk lines of the Yamal-Europe gas. The resulting increase in export volumes can boost Gazprom's dominant position on the European natural gas market. Gazprom is also moving forward in Europe by acquiring the internal transportation and distribution networks of old EU countries, following the expansion pattern used in Eastern European countries. Currently Gazprom is producing 540 bcm of natural gas. Exports to the EU constitutes 25 percent of its total production, but brings 75 percent of its revenues. Gazprom's exports account for 20-25 % of Russia's export revenues. Therefore, Europe is a strategic market for Russia and it is expected that Russia will seek to use its leverage to prevent the opening of a new natural gas corridor connecting the Caspian to Turkey and later, to Europe.

In all the potential development scenarios Russia is the winner, but Turkey may risk its position as an energy hub, if it focuses solely on Russian gas. This will not serve the long-term interests of Turkey's Eastern European, Caspian and Caucasian neighbors, nor, most importantly, Turkey's own long-term interests. As experience shows, Russia may use its energy position to influence the political decisions of other countries. Although motivations may be different, Turkey has already demonstrated a cool attitude towards Ukraine's and Georgia's NATO aspiration, and openly opposed NATO's naval deployments in Black Sea. Many think

that Russia is the factor in these recent Turkish foreign policy decisions.

IMPLICATIONS: Among the top policy priorities for the EU's energy development is "avoidance of strategic dependence". But Europe already has a strategic dependence on Russian gas, specifically on the monopolist Gazprom's gas. This dependence varies from 22 percent of demand in France, to almost 40 percent in Germany, 60 percent in Turkey, 65 percent in Austria, 79 percent in the Czech Republic, 97 percent in Bulgaria, and 100 percent in Slovakia.

One step towards an alternative gas corridor to Europe was considered to be the South Caucasus Pipeline, connecting Baku via Georgia to Erzurum in Turkey, which will deliver 6 bcm of gas to Turkey per year under an existing gas purchase agreement. Small volumes will be delivered to Azerbaijan and Georgia, thus contribute to the energy security of those countries. The initial capacity of the gas pipeline will be 8.4 bcm per year with throughput capacity to be increased to up to 30 bcm per annum, with the potential of being connected to Turkmen producers, aiming at European gas markets. The Azerbaijani fields' proximity to Turkey makes its position very competitive on Turkish and South-Eastern European markets. The natural gas connection between Turkey and Greece is currently under development, and it is to be commissioned in 2006. This connection will provide the first opportunity to ship Caspian natural gas directly to the EU, which can be done in several ways. One option is to construct a Turkey-Greece-Italy pipeline, and another is the construction of a Turkey-Baumgarten (Austria) system via Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Austria. Both projects are currently at the feasibility study development stage. However, with greater Russian pressure and growing Turkish support for the Blue Stream pipeline, it will become increasingly problematic to fill these pipelines with Caspian natural gas.

The major alternative option may be the delivery of Caspian natural gas to Eastern Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia, a new undersea pipeline to Ukraine, and then onward to Europe. Current annual demand in Ukraine and other Eastern European countries exceeds 100 bcm, and most of them are willing to diversify their supplies. The major issue for this type of project is invariably commercial viability and the willingness of

markets to assume construction costs through increased prices. Russia's decision to increase the price of natural gas for Ukraine up to European levels opens a new opportunity for the funding of the new pipeline. Ukraine is moving toward high gas prices anyway, and if delivered via a Caucasian energy corridor rather than via Russia, Turkmen or Azeri gas may be the better option for Ukraine. The ideal option would be to have Kazakh and Turkmen gas delivered from the Eastern Caspian to Baku via an undersea pipeline, then to Georgian Black Sea coast and via undersea pipeline to Ukraine, to be connected to the Ukrainian export pipelines and the Ukrainian system.

CONCLUSIONS: It is in the interest of Eastern European countries, and Europe in general, to diversify supply and find alternative ways of access to natural gas. This is stated in Europe's energy policy priorities. The Caspian region is a sound alternative to the current limited number of suppliers. But Europe needs a clear strategy to bring Caspian gas to its consumers. Such a strategy will require close cooperation with the countries of the region, including producer and transit states. Caspian natural gas will help Europe diversify its energy supply and reduce dependence on the state-owned Russian monopoly, Gazprom. The diversification and competition is in the long-term interest not only of Europe but of Russia as well. Diversification of supply routes and gas sector reforms in Europe will eventually drive Gazprom, as well as the Russian gas sector in general, towards much needed reforms.

A new natural gas pipeline from the Caspian to Ukraine and Europe would open new opportunities for strategic cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Poland and other Eastern European countries. With Georgia and Ukraine moving toward NATO membership, this development may bring an additional cementing element to broader Euro-Atlantic cooperation. It would also balance increasing Russian influence in Turkey, and in Europe in general.

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AZERBAIJAN'S POST-ELECTION SITUATION: A LOSE-LOSE SITUATION

Alman Mir Ismail

Azerbaijan's post-election situation, although calm in the beginning, nevertheless ended up with a severe police crackdown on the demonstrators on November 26. This was inevitable, as both the opposition and the authorities are eager to "show their muscles." As a result, the country's image is strongly damaged abroad and President Ilham Aliyev seems to have proven that there are more players inside the regime but himself. In the long run, the question is whether the traditional opposition can survive or whether its collapse is inevitable. There is a risk that this would damage Western interests in the country and open up new opportunities for radical elements.

BACKGROUND: After the voting in the November 6 Parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan was over, many international and domestic observers were anxious to see the follow-up events. On the one hand, many feared that a repeat of October 16, 2003 would take place. At that time, police forces and opposition activists clashed in downtown Baku following the fraudulent Presidential elections, resulting in the death of a protestor as well as the severe beating and arrest of hundreds of opposition members. A few dramatically-inclined analysts feared that Azerbaijan's post-election scenario would be similar to the Andijan events this May, when Uzbek authorities reportedly killed hundreds of civilians. Finally, there was a small minority of Azerbaijan watchers, who believed that the Ukrainian revolutionary scenario was likely in Baku.

Indeed, the prevention of post-election violence seemed the highest priority of the diplomatic circles. Both the U.S. ambassador in Baku as well as the OSCE and Council of Europe delegations urged restraint on both sides. They called on Azerbaijani authorities to permit the opposition's post-election rallies and asked opposition leaders to avoid destructive behavior.

Both sides followed the lead. The opposition decided to wait until November 7 (the day when the international observers came out with preliminary assessment of the election process) to declare their

further actions. When the assessment came out to be highly critical, the date for the first rally was set on November 8. However, the authorities refused to sanction protests that day and instead offered November 9. The opposition, eager to demonstrate to the world that it has peaceful means of struggle in mind, agreed. Looking back, it is clear that it was a tactical mistake. Organizing protest demonstration only three days after the elections was similar to missing the train. The demonstration was approved by the authorities and a significant police force was present around the venue of the demonstration. This eliminated any chance for an "orange revolution" in the country. Besides, the Galaba square, which was agreed upon by both opposition and the authorities, was far away from key governmental buildings.

The opposition gathered a maximum of 10-000-15,000 supporters to their first rally. Two other rallies were held since, but both were of similar nature and strength. By November 26, it was clear that the opposition's weekly demonstrations did not produce the desired results. Foremost, the rallies gathered the same amount of people, mostly from the core membership base of the Azadliq (Freedom) bloc. This showed that the majority of citizens did not care much about Azadliq's struggle and already moved on into the post-election period. The pre-election surveys proved right: the opposition did not have major popular support due to their outdated election message and poorly chosen tactics.

Time was working against the opposition, as the international attention to Azerbaijan's elections was fading. Most foreign journalists and observer missions left Baku and the majority of opposition members started to express frustration with the Azadliq bloc leadership's lack of a post-election vision. It was time to make a drastic change and that change came on November 26. During this fourth demonstration, opposition leaders Ali Kerimli, Lala Shovket Hajiyeva, and Sardar Jalaloglu called for a sit-in campaign and urged the demonstrators not to leave the square. The police responded with excessive brutality, using tear gas and batons to crack down on the protestors. Hundreds of people were injured or arrested.

IMPLICATIONS: In the short-term, both the opposition and the government gained from the November 26 crackdown. The opposition leaders showed their determination to their core supporters and once again reinforced their image as a "peaceful and civilized" force. It made international headlines and managed to show to the rest of the world how "despotic" the regime in Azerbaijan is. The opposition's face was well saved. At the same time, the government forces, tired of a senseless wait-and-see game with the opposition, seemed happy to show who the real master in the neighborhood is. However, in the long run, both the opposition and the government have lost from this situation.

The opposition is in its most difficult time since Azerbaijan's independence. It is clear that having lost all elections in the past 12 years, opposition parties have lost the faith not only of a large portion of the country's population, but also of its core members and supporters. Many people believe that the current traditional opposition parties have outdated themselves, and thus it is ever harder for them to gather public support. As the BTC pipeline starts bringing major oil revenues to the country and the welfare of the citizens starts gradually but steadily improving, it will be even more difficult for the opposition parties to garner public support in the future. Thus the opposition is in a deadlocked situation and short-term face saving will not help it in the long run. Besides, the division of opinion

inside the Azadliq bloc is also becoming increasingly clear. Isa Gambar now supports a non-violent means of struggle, and Ali Kerimli and Rasul Guliyev urge confrontation with the authorities. The divisions inside the Azadliq bloc will finalize once some of the elected members from this bloc decide not to boycott Parliament, as is urged by the opposition leaders at the moment.

The November 26 brutality was also a major defeat for the authorities and more specifically for President Ilham Aliyev. His intentions to hold clean elections in the country, no matter how sincere and honest, nevertheless ended up with another brutal crackdown on the political opponents of the regime. This shows either that President Aliyev does not have a full command over the political processes in the country or that the regime can not help but use the stick whenever it wants. The usage of the excessive force against the opposition has become somewhat of a norm, which is a dangerous trend, and raises the issue of control over and reform of the law enforcement structures.

Another major loser in the situation in Azerbaijan's public image abroad. With images of police forces beating its citizens, the acceptance of Azerbaijan as a democratic state has been shelved for years. Azerbaijan will receive an adequate response from international organizations as well as during the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. It is highly unlikely that the West will support Azerbaijan's quest for a favorable solution to Nagorno-Karabakh with this poor human rights record.

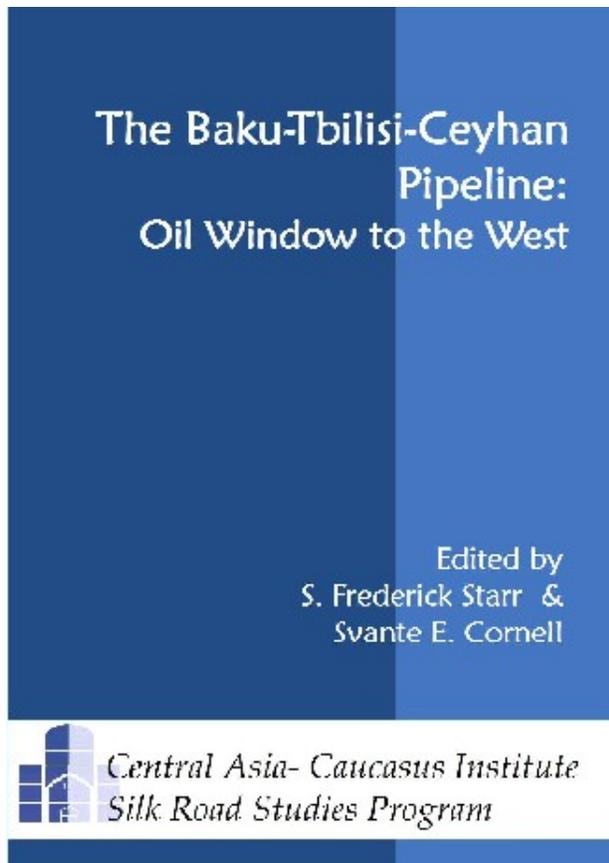
Finally, the perhaps major loser is the West. As Sardar Jalal-oglu, deputy chairman of the Democratic Party, stated, "the pro-Western opposition in Azerbaijan has failed." Opposition newspapers have full of angry and disappointed words towards the U.S. and ordinary citizens are becoming convinced that the West is interested only in Azerbaijan's oil. Of course, it would be naïve to assume that the West was ready to intervene into Azerbaijan to overthrow the Aliyev regime. Yet the opposition's expectations were too inflated and the disappointment comes with a bitter taste now. This will significantly weaken American

policies in Azerbaijan and will start a new phase in Azerbaijan's domestic politics – a phase full of fertile soil for the growth of Islamic radicalism.

CONCLUSIONS: Despite some major improvements in the electoral process, Azerbaijan's authorities have failed to change the image of the country abroad, and with the November 26 crackdown on the opposition parties, they once again showed its repressive nature. The opposition parties, meanwhile, have failed to develop an adequate post-election strategy. Their slow and

weak response to the electoral fraud has put them in a limbo situation, in which they can move neither forward nor backward. It is expected that some of the elected members from the opposition will join the Parliament and thus will split the unity of the Azadliq bloc. In the long-run, the traditional opposition in Azerbaijan will experience a further major weakening.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Alman Mir-Ismael is a freelance journalist based in Baku.



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CONTENTS:

- 1. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: School of Modernity**
S. Frederick Starr
- 2. Geostrategic Implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline**
Svante E. Cornell, Mamuka Tsereteli and Vladimir Socor
- 3. Economic Implications of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline**
Jonathan Elkind
- 4. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Azerbaijan**
Svante E. Cornell and Fariz Ismailzade
- 5. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Georgia**
Vladimer Papava
- 6. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Implications for Turkey**
Zeyno Baran
- 7. Environmental and Social Aspects of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline**
David Blatchford

VESTED INTERESTS TO DETERMINE KAZAKHSTAN'S PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Ustina Markus, Nigmat Ibadildin and Ryan Kennedy

The most notable characteristic of the presidential election campaign in Kazakhstan is that the outcome is already being treated as a foregone conclusion. Although four opposition candidates are challenging incumbent President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the candidates themselves appear to be going through the motions of campaigning, rather than sincerely believing they have a chance to win. Much of this is put down to the fact that the majority of Kazakhs have a vested interest in the current system and worry that a change in leadership could threaten their livelihoods and positions.

BACKGROUND: In July, President Nazarbayev confirmed he would run for another term as president of Kazakhstan. The move was controversial, since under the constitution an individual may only hold office for two consecutive terms, but Nazarbayev argued that since the constitution was only passed after he was already in office, his first term didn't count. Surprisingly, although the opposition is now voicing complaints about the move, there was barely a ripple during the summer when Nazarbayev made his announcement.

Nazarbayev was first elected in 1990 for a five-year term. He has extended his tenure through referendums on two occasions, the last in 1999 when he added an additional two years to the presidential term. One Kazakh journalist noted that under the circumstances, if Nazarbayev wins this election, it is not even his third term as president, but will take him into what should be his fifth term.

Initially, seventeen candidates announced their intention to run in the elections. This number dwindled down to five, including Nazarbayev. Five were disqualified for not showing sufficient knowledge of the Kazakh language; another five were disqualified for failing to collect the requisite number of signatures; and two withdrew their nominations. The four remaining challengers have each chosen rather uninspired themes for their campaigns. Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, the candidate of the movement For A Just Kazakhstan (an umbrella

organization for several opposition parties), is the favored challenger with opinion polls showing a support level of around 17 percent. He has based his campaign on justice and fairness—not a particularly revolutionary platform. Despite this rather straightforward set of campaign issues, his program runs 34 pages, prompting one commentator to ask if he seriously expected people to plough through 34 pages to figure out what he stood for.

The other contenders include Alikhan Baimenov, leader of the opposition party Ak Zhol. Baimenov issued a smaller, 12-page booklet on his platform. Again, much of it is the usual populist fare about raising salaries, reforming the agricultural sector, and the unity of the nation. The wildcard candidate is Yerasyil Albykasymov, representing the People's Communist Party—an offshoot of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, whose split was allegedly encouraged by the ruling powers to take votes away from Tuyakbai and Baimenov. Albykasymov is regarded as a populist and has the most appeal because of his lively style, when compared to Tuyakbai or Baimenov. Mels Eleusizov is running on an environmental platform—not a very controversial stand since everyone agrees protecting the environment is good.

IMPLICATIONS: The incumbent Nazarbayev has based his campaign on the theme of stability. Every evening, the television station KTK (owned by Nazarbayev's son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev) runs a song about the unity of the nation showing all of

Kazakhstan's ethnic groups happily getting along. When the state-owned, or Nazarbayev family-owned media, shows footage of events in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, which had a colored revolution earlier in the year, it is portrayed as a chaotic place without order. The Kyrgyz themselves have expressed disgust at the coverage of their country. On the domestic front, Nazarbayev has been stressing progress, with the slogan "Tolka vpered" (Only Forward). The themes of stability and progress appear sufficient to ensure Nazarbayev wins, despite scandals surrounding the distribution of contracts in the country's energy sector, or complaints about his eldest daughter's, Dariga, and her husband's monopoly of the country's media.

Support for Nazarbayev stems from a number of factors. First, Kazakhs genuinely feel they are better off than people in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan or the neighboring Russian oblasts. The trickle-down effect of foreign investment in the country is evident. Cars in the major cities are newer, western models, with Russian-made Ladas turning into endangered species in Almaty and Astana. This new affluence is not limited to a small elite. A middle class is apparent in all of the major cities. Thus, even though poverty persists in the country, a sizable sector has a respectable standard of living, which makes people less hostile to the incumbent than they were in Kyrgyzstan, and less likely to seek any radical changes.

Another factor driving support for Nazarbayev is that many of the newly rich and middle classes, as well as foreign companies working in Kazakhstan (mostly in the energy sector), worry that a change of leadership could affect their positions. Judicial independence is not well established in Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev can not only appoint judges, but also dismiss them), and so the entire economic and political system could be shaken up if a radically new leadership takes control. This is particularly true with regard to privatization deals under Nazarbayev, which are widely perceived to have

involved personal deals with the president. Thus, it is in the interest of these groups to keep Nazarbayev in office, since he is the only guarantee for protecting their contracts and properties.

Finally, Kazakhs genuinely credit Nazarbayev with having maintained stability in the country when separatism threatened in the northern oblasts in the early years of independence, and with maintaining Kazakhstan's independence as a Kazakh state. They also give him credit for having managed relations with the country's two powerful neighbors—Russia and China—and also for not having resorted to violent government crackdowns as in Uzbekistan.

CONCLUSIONS: None of the opposition candidates pose a real threat to Nazarbayev, who appeals to the country's strong desire for stability and his record for economic improvement, which has been helped by the high oil prices in recent years. Media loyal to the President have also made a concerted effort to show that nothing good has come from the colored revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia. The negative perception of the revolutions was well illustrated when Nazarbayev told reports that anyone accusing the government of corruption should "Go to Kyrgyzstan and see where things are really bad." There is some concern that Nazarbayev may be hard pressed to carry the vote in the old capital Almaty—the hotbed of opposition movements and NGOs. Nonetheless, his popularity in many other parts of the country is genuine, and the fears of the new middle and wealthier classes of any re-privatization as they see happening in Ukraine are so strong that many believe their best prospects lie with the incumbent.

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RUSSIA REALIZES ITS CARTEL

Stephen Blank

Russia recently signed an alliance with Uzbekistan, which generated considerable reporting. While this has significance for Central Asia, analysts lost sight of the fact that Moscow or Russian governmental agencies like Gazprom have also concurrently signed agreements with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan that have more important repercussions. Specifically, these agreements represent the virtual completion of Russia's successful efforts to organize a gas cartel of producers wherein it would dominate the export of CIS natural gas and obtain a stranglehold over the economies of the gas-producing and consuming states in the CIS. This cartel also will have significant repercussions for other major consumers like Europe, China and potentially India.

BACKGROUND: In early 2002 Russian President Vladimir Putin called for a cartel of gas producers in the CIS. This clearly was a major initiative connected with the rejuvenation of Russian efforts to augment the value and the effective deployment of its economic instruments of power in Central Asia as a response to the American presence in Central Asia after September 11. While superficially it might appear that he was calling for a natural gas equivalent of OPEC, in fact the asymmetry of pipeline distribution and of power in the CIS would inevitably tilt such a cartel to Russian hegemony and dominance. Success in building such a cartel would materially and strikingly enhance Russian power and presence in Central Asia, the CIS, and global gas markets, giving it a truly formidable instrument of power for deployment abroad. Since then the Putin regime has moved steadily, even in the face of setbacks and obstacles, to take advantage of its strategic dominance over natural gas pipelines in the CIS to force other producers to come to terms with Moscow lest they not be able to export natural gas to consumers abroad. Finally this year Moscow successfully completed agreements with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and more recently with Kazakhstan's KazMunaiGAz firm giving it virtual control over the export of their products through Russian pipelines.

These deals have several consequences. Moscow no longer will have a competitor who can challenge its price setting capabilities with regard to natural gas form within the CIS. Thus we can expect more signs of monopolistic price-setting behavior by Russia in the global natural gas market. Second, these deals give Russia enormous leverage, if not hegemony over the producer states because it can manipulate prices and export rates as well as the actual transmission of gas to its markets. Not only can it shut down consumers who oppose it on various issues as it repeatedly has done in the CIS, it also can shut down producers as well for reasons not connected with gas but which affect what Russia considers to be its key interests. Third, by converting local energy officials and companies into dependencies of Russia, Moscow gains major points of leverage within the politics and societies of those states which we can be sure it will not hesitate to exploit.

Fourth, the implications of the creation of this cartel extend beyond Central Asia. As the American firm of strategic analysis, www.stratfor.biz observed, "All natural gas produced in the former Soviet Union comes from Gazprom, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, or Turkmenistan with any natural gas originating in a country ending in 'stan' having to transit through Kazakhstan and Russia on its way to any market. The KazMunaiGas deal means that Gazprom -- and

by extension the Kremlin -- now owns all of that gas. Any state wishing to use Central Asian gas in order to get energy independence from Russia is now out of luck. This is particularly worrisome for states such as Ukraine and the Baltic states who now have no reasonable alternative to Russian-owned natural gas. Russia has been bandying the threat of sharply higher energy prices around for years. Now it has finally taken the concrete step necessary to make that an arbitrary reality.”

IMPLICATIONS: At a single stroke Russia has undermined both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan’s overall sovereignty not to mention gaining control of their natural gas production. It will be able to use the profits it gains from its price setting capabilities to inhibit their development and thereby perpetuate both their backwardness and their dependence upon energy while keeping them in an essentially colonialist position. Neither is this cartel’s influence confined to the CIS. Through it, Russia will be able to frustrate the hopes of outside consumers like India and China who have money to buy equity in Central Asian gas producers and who have hoped to gain reliable sources of energy for themselves through the purchase of such equity. Now it won’t matter whether or not they buy companies because Russia controls the pipelines and could use that leverage to buy out the producers as well or force itself upon them as an equity owning partner instead of other potential rivals. Thus developments in Central Asia will exercise great influence upon trends in the Baltic states, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia. And we should have little doubt that Moscow will move to exploit all the benefits accruing to it from these deals to consolidate this cartel and use it to further its avowed aims of hegemony throughout the CIS.

By definition, a cartel allows its members to set prices in a monopolistic way and force consumers to

accept it. This is how OPEC functions. But it also is the case that in many, if not most cartels one or two states tend to be the dominant figures in the cartel and the real price setters. In regard to OPEC, Saudi Arabia fulfills this function. Russia aims to fulfill this same function in the cartel of CIS gas producers that it is creating. It has moved steadily to bring about this cartel but without much fanfare, almost offstage, as it were. Nevertheless by these recent agreements Putin has forged what could become the most powerful instrument of Russian foreign policy in the CIS if not abroad. It has also parlayed this instrument of policy into what could be a formidable source of leverage upon energy-hungry European or Asian states who will be forced to reckon seriously with Russian energy and other interests, even those extraneous to energy, in their future calculations.

CONCLUSIONS: Inasmuch as there is abundant evidence of Russia's continuing use of the energy card to bring CIS regimes to heel or try to do so and to use its energy leverage in Europe and Asia, these deals ultimately have a much greater and wider resonance than does the important agreement with Uzbekistan. Consequently we should not be surprised at further uses of the energy instrument, particularly natural gas in this context, to try and compel CIS regimes into submission to Russian dictates. This is even more likely given the seasonal importance of natural gas in the winter time. And therefore all analysis of Central Asian and even Russian foreign policy will now have to take into account this major change in what used to be called the correlation of forces.

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FIELD REPORTS

GEORGIAN DEFENSE REFORMS: ELIMINATING ABUSE REMAINS PRIORITY

Kakha Jibladze

Despite plans to join NATO as a full member in 2009, reforms in the Georgian military are still overshadowed by allegations of irresponsible spending, lack of transparency and limited control over day-to-day operations at bases throughout the country.

On October 27, Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili appeared before the Georgian parliament to answer questions concerning military spending and transparency. In May, a visiting team from NATO criticized the Georgian reform effort, stating that while progress existed, there were problems. According to reports by the news service Civil.ge, the team was particularly concerned over the frequent staff reshuffles in the Defense Ministry and General Staff, military spending and acquisitions, and the lack of strong civilian control over military institutions.

While a recent visit by NATO's special representative to the Caucasus and Central Asia, Robert Simmons, ended on a high note, critics remain at home. During his meeting with the parliament, Okruashvili dismissed opposition criticism over spending and transparency, stating that the Ministry of Defense would submit a list of purchases after they had been made so their plans couldn't be 'thwarted' by 'our ill-wisher neighbors.'

Members of the opposition have called for more transparent spending all year, especially after a damning report was issued by the NGO Liberty and Justice in February. However, a recent debacle concerning the purchase of 38 reportedly malfunctioning tanks has also added fuel to the fire for more oversight. In an April report on military spending published by EurasiaNet.org, western

military advisors also criticized the ministry's rampant spending policies.

According to the draft budget for 2006, defense spending will be raised considerably. Civil.ge reported that 392.6 million Georgian lari (USD 218.1 million) has been earmarked for the Ministry of Defense, an increase of roughly 20 million lari or more than 3% of Georgia's GDP.

Parts of those funds are being allocated for new bases: a new base scheduled to open this month in the western city of Senaki has cost a reported 8-9 million lari. However, a string of high profile AWOL cases and abuse allegations are tarnishing the reformer image of new shiny facilities and western-standard training.

Over the past six months there have been a series of incidents concerning reported abuse at bases around Georgia. In April a soldier, Arkady Kukava, was hospitalized after reportedly being forced to spend all night outside the barracks half-naked. In October, ten ethnic Azeri soldiers fled their base in eastern Georgia, citing abuse and persecution. Seven ethnic Georgian soldiers in the western region of the country also ran away from their base this month after going without food or proper housing.

According to these seven men, while they were originally stationed at a good base and treated well with regular meals, they were then transferred to a different base which was nothing but tents. They were forced to sleep in the mud and at times were not fed.

It is obvious that there has been a lot of progress made; soldiers this author spoke with who served during former President Shevardnadze say the

situation is like night and day. Before they did not even have uniforms, let alone training and discipline. And a major problem with soldiers and morale could revolve around the fact that after a decade of decline, young conscripts are not prepared for the reality of a real soldier's life. Okruashvili himself has admitted that many problems still exist on the ground; the hierarchy of 'vazhnaki,' older soldiers who threaten new recruits with bodily harm if they are not paid, still exist.

During his statements to the parliament, Okruashvili called the 2009 deadline for full NATO membership 'optimistic.' "We, I mean the government, are very hopeful about our NATO aspirations. This process can be accomplished by 2009 – I mean Georgia's full-fledged membership in NATO. This is really a very optimistic forecast and there is much to do to materialize this forecast," he said.

Okruashvili and the government should be proud of the steps they have taken; the Georgian army has

not looked this professional since the former Soviet army was in place. However, fancy machinery and big budgets will mean little if Georgian citizens are unwilling to join the army. According to Okruashvili, the army will be conscript-free by 2009. If soldiers continue to flee bad conditions, it will be hard to convince their neighbors to enlist.

The nation needs a professional army, and the Ministry of Defense should have the necessary funding to create such a military. However, without oversight, proper planning, professional training and human treatment of soldiers the government will not see returns on its investment. An army is more than equipment; creating a NATO-worthy army takes more than a big checkbook. If there are inhumane conditions at bases, no amount of spending – thrifty or otherwise – will bring the Georgian military up to western standards.

LOOKING BACK: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN TAJIKISTAN

Bakhtiyor Naimov

On February 27, 2005, the first round of Parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan. These were fully concluded on March 13 with the second round taking place. On February 27, 2005, the first round of Parliamentary elections were held in Tajikistan. These were fully concluded on March 13 with the second round taking place. The elections were held generally in calm and orderly conditions, and in retrospect seem a better development than the in neighboring Kyrgyzstan.

Six registered parties participated in the elections: the National Democratic Party of Tajikistan (NDPT), which is the party of the President and consequently the most popular and strongest; the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) with its biggest support

in the rural areas especially in the central valleys; the Communist Party (CP), which once used to be the dominant party; the Social Democratic Party (SDP); the Democratic Party (DP); and the Social Party (SP). The latter are all small parties with small constituencies, and no clear and original agenda. Not surprisingly, the NDPT won the overwhelming majority of the votes, i.e. fifty-four seats that made up 74 percent of all seats. The IRP received the same number of seats, two, as it did in the 2000 elections. The CP turned out to be the biggest loser of this election, as in comparison to its thirteen seats in 2000 it won only four this year. The SDP, DP, and SP did not win any seats. Despite this 'outstanding' victory of the NDPT,

there were no riots or tensions in the republic, as opposed to neighboring Kyrgyzstan, where the spring parliamentary elections resulted in the overthrow of President Askar Akaev.

Although the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) claimed that the parliamentary elections in Tajikistan failed to meet international standards for democratic elections, the biggest contributors to the low standard of the elections was not fraud or harassment by the dominant party, but rather the inexperience in holding democratic elections and the harsh economic and climate conditions in the remote constituencies of the republic, namely the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAO), where bad weather prevented many observers from arriving on time. Especially during the winter time, lack of electricity was one of the biggest barriers to ensure orderly elections on the day of voting.

The NDPT most likely indeed won the majority of votes, firstly because of the increasing popularity of President Rakhmonov in Tajikistan. Secondly, the absence of attractive programs on the part of the other parties strengthened the incumbent. In fact, most of the opposition parties, eg. SDP, DP, and SP have very similar platforms. Finally, the political consciousness of most of the Tajik people is limited to the idea that there must be a leader, who is associated with the state; therefore, the Presidents' party should naturally win. It is possible that the CP lost some of its votes to the NDPT due to the

unfair and unequal election campaign; however, part of the population did not vote for it, because the nostalgia for communism is over by now.

On the positive side, it is worth noting that the elections took place peacefully and there was some elements of democracy in that six parties openly competed. Besides, Tajikistan is the only country in the region to have an officially registered Islamic party. In addition, the GBAO with 5 percent of Tajikistan's population was one of the oppositionist regions during the civil war, but now it has 9 percent of the seats in the Parliament, revealing that it is actually privileged. More importantly, the general mood of the population was satisfied with the elections. The first open elections in independent Tajikistan caused a civil war; therefore, every election is perceived by the people as something to be cautious of. Consequently, as peace is the main priority in Tajikistan, it is in fact one of the unifying factors in the country just as victory over Fascism was for the people of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan's citizens are happy that the elections did not cause any tension. Surprisingly, even a member of the IRP in Dushanbe noted in an interview that "as long as the NDPT in general and the President in particular maintain stability and peace in the country, my party and I are happy with it". Realistically then, such an outcome is better than what took place in Kyrgyzstan, where small groups of people overthrew the government and instead of creating stability the new regime is actually making peace uncertain in that country.

KAZAKH AUTHORITIES FEAR PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AFTER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Marat Yermukanov

At a press conference with Ukrainian journalists during his recent visit to Kyiv, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev merely laughed off an

awkward question about the possibility of Ukrainian scenario of orange revolution in Kazakhstan, jokingly saying that the only thing his

country wants to import from Ukraine is gas. But the mounting tension in anticipation of presidential elections scheduled for December 4 is not a laughing matter. Authorities have repeatedly voiced their suspicion that opposition forces were plotting mass disorders after the election.

On November 12, a prominent public figure, Zamanbek Nurkadilov was found dead in his room by his wife, popular singer Makpal Zhunusova, with bullet wounds to his head and heart. President Nursultan Nazarbayev sent his condolences to family members of the deceased and ordered a thorough investigation of the case. Until now, police investigations headed by the deputy interior minister did not produce any clue to Nurkadilov's death which triggered a flurry of speculations. Was it a politically motivated murder, a killing committed by criminal gangs or a suicide? The most embarrassing point for authorities is that the death of Nurkadilov, former governor of Almaty city and Almaty region and chairman of the State Emergency Agency, who later joined the opposition camp comes in the middle of the election campaign promised to be held free and fair. With an overwhelming sway of popular support on his side and confident of success in the elections, Nursultan Nazarbayev is doing his utmost to observe the set rules of the game and avoid any collision with his opponents. It is hard to believe, for this reason, that the regime had a hand in Nurkadilov's death.

The deceased former official fell afoul of the existing regime in March last year, when, still in office as chairman of the Emergency Agency, he lashed out with harsh criticism leveled against Nursultan Nazarbayev. Nurkadilov, in an unprecedented bold statement published in opposition papers, accused the state leader of embezzlement of funds accrued from oil revenues, nepotism and family and clan corruption. Soon after the bombshell criticism, Nurkadilov was relieved of his duties and joined the For Fair Kazakhstan opposition bloc. However, over the past six months he did not make public appearances and seemed to leave a reclusive life distancing himself from political activities. Kairat Nurkadilov, the son of the

deceased, in an interview to national television channel Khabar appreciated the investigation efforts undertaken by a team of qualified forensic experts and said his father's death was not connected to political purposes. Meanwhile, Nurkadilov's case triggered all sorts of conjectures and rumors. Zhumash Kenebai, the editor of the opposition paper Zhuma Taims, alleged that a few days before his death Zamanbek Nurkadilov revealed to him over the telephone that he possessed 'sensational information' which would seriously affect the outcome of the upcoming presidential elections.

Nurkadilov's death threatens to disturb the temporary lull before the elections. The chairman of the Central Election Committee, Onalsyn Zhumabekov, expressed his apprehensions that on December 4 some political forces may provoke public disorder using as a pretext the inevitable absence of some voters from voters' lists. Law enforcement bodies are braced up to an unexpected turn of events. The chief of the National Security Committee Nartay Durbayev believes that some "troublemakers" may try to "destabilize the situation in the state". He said any attempt to cause public disorder will be suppressed with all severity of the law.

Authorities and opposition have long been trading accusations suspecting each other in an attempt to "rock the boat". The President's daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva, who is actively campaigning for her father on tours to the regions, said Nurkadilov's death plays into the hands of the radical opposition, but in no way suits the authorities. Her words seem to carry conviction. Opinion polls show high political ratings for the incumbent president. The director of the independent Risk Assessment Group, Dosym Satpayev, thinks that the death of Zamanbek Nurkadilov will not influence the mood of the electorate.

Supporters of Nazarbayev obviously fear the negative resonance that Nurkadilov's death may provoke outside Kazakhstan. Dariga Nazarbayeva said that Nurkadilov's death is the internal affair of Kazakhstan to be sorted out within the country. At the same time, she asserted that unnamed "outside

factors” were trying to influence the outcome of presidential election. Did she mean Russia or the West? Dariga Nazarbayeva’s words echo with the announcement by CEC Chairman Zhumabekov that the CEC did not see any reason to register CIS observers from the CIS Election Monitoring Organization (CIS-EMO) as this organization has neither NGO nor international status.

Kazakh election authorities’ dislike for the CIS-EMO is apparently rooted in the fact that this organization is reputed to have pulled strings in ‘color revolutions’ in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia. The head of the CIS-EMO, Marina

Bogdanovich appealed to the President of Kazakhstan to get her organization registered, but to no avail. The refusal to register CIS-EMO signals that Astana is growing impatient with foreign observers. The Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan flatly rejected the proposal of the OSCE to integrate members of political parties into local election commissions in equal proportion. Authorities do not doubt that Nazarbayev will win the elections, and the winner is always right.

ASHGABAT, NOVEMBER 25, 2002: WHO LOST, WHO WON?

Muhammad Tahir

November 25, 2002 began as an ordinary calm day in the Central Asian country of Turkmenistan. As usual, early in the morning the autocratic President Saparmurat Niyazov was driving to his office in his bullet-proof car.

But unusually, Niyazov this time faced an unprecedented situation on the highway named after him. Usually there is no traffic on the highway – not only because of strict security measures, but also because of the early hour. But this day was different: not only did he see traffic on the road, there were also two trucks heading towards his car and a short time later he saw people firing at him.

Niyazov’s car seemed fully prepared for such an unexpected situation. Instead of stopping, it accelerated, leaving behind all who were later named terrorists. After three years since this incident happened, no one still knows exactly how many lives were lost or how many were injured in the incident. Whether or not the news of incident were accurate, the events of that day led to the start of a new chapter of repression in an already repressive state.

Many experts, including opposition leader Boris Shikhmuradov in an interview shortly after this incident, accused the government of staging this drama. According to them, Niyazov himself wanted a basis for the further repressive measures, which he initiated shortly after the incident. Explaining why Niyazov would need to do this, another opposition leader in exile, Nurmukhmad Khanamov on November 25, 2005, said that ‘opposition groups were planing to stage a nationwide protest against the Turkmen regime. Niyazov was informed about this just before the demonstrations and he had to block it before it happened’.

Other experts, including Iranian analyst Farhad Javadi, say this could make sense, The government could handle demonstrations on the streets, and security forces could even imprison all protesters, but such a reaction would draw the attention of the international community. This incident provided Niyazov with the cover that he needed to take any kind of action he liked. ‘Because the fight against terrorism has been at the top of the world agenda since September 11, there was little chance of a

world reaction against Niyazov's move,' said Mr. Javadi.

The possible actions of the government and its direction was became clearer a few minutes after the incident, when Niyazov appeared live on Turkmen TV. He described the act as an act of terrorism and accused the exiled opposition of staging it in order to take over power. Operations began against all citizens who may have had foreign connections; relatives and friends of opposition leaders especially were chosen as the first victims of this crackdown. Many of them were arrested and jailed for a number of years, their property was confiscated, and many others were forced into internal exile, without proper investigation. After the November 25 incident, a decree on 'Enemies of the State' was introduced for the first time in this country and was later used as a pretext for action against people who disagreed with the policies of the current regime.

Starting from November 25, 2002, restrictions against the activities of foreign NGOs increased, the press turned up its engine of propaganda for the president's personality cult. Human rights abuses became routine, an exit visa system was introduced and getting entry visas to Turkmenistan became almost impossible.

Three years after this incident, due to the lack of an independent investigation, still no-one know exactly what happened on 25 November 2002. According to Dr Mehmet Seyfettin Erol of the Central Asian Strategic Studies Center of Turkey, whatever happened that day, President Niyazov took advantage of it to take full control of Turkmen soil. Today, wherever there is any terrorist attack, Niyazov is one of the first leaders to send a message of condolence to the leader of the victims' country. He does not neglect to mention 25 November, saying 'we know the pain of terrorist attacks'.

Many believe that Niyazov initially managed to benefit from this incident, but when Niyazov continued to reject international investigations, even requests for permission to meet with detainees, these advantages turned against him. Today Turkmenistan is on the list of the worst of the

worst offenders in every international report. In the Report of Freedom House for 2004 as well as 2005, Turkmenistan is listed as one of the five most repressive countries in the world.

Other organizations, such as the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, also express deep concern over the country, especially the deteriorating situation following the events of November 25. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's special reporter, Professor Emmanuel Decaux, recently reported in detail the concerns about the situation in the country.

On November 21, 2005, a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly's Social and Humanitarian Committee by a vote of 70 to 38 with 58 abstentions, accused Turkmen authorities of restricting freedom of thought, assembly, conscience and religion. It was the third resolution of its kind since the so-called assassination attempt on the President in Turkmenistan.

In spite of its huge underground resources of gas and oil, as a result of repression, Turkmenistan is today one of the most isolated countries in the world. The number of countries who want to be seen in line with the Turkmen regime is getting smaller, as shown by the number of world leaders who have visited Turkmenistan in recent years. In 2005 Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko was the only leader to pay an official visit to Turkmenistan.

Niyazov has made only one trip abroad in the entire year, which was, as usual, to Russia. According to western experts, in spite of this international isolation, there is no significant threat against the power of the current President. The nations whose voices are raised in support of democracy are busy with their own problems and the Turkmen opposition has lost all internal support.

NEWS DIGEST

KAZAKHSTAN-CHINA PIPELINE COMPLETED

16 November

Kazakhstan's National Petroleum & Natural Gas Co. and China National Petroleum Corp. finished their 600-mile Atasu-to-Alashankou oil pipeline. The line can move 140 million barrels per year of crude oil from Kazakhstan to China starting Jan. 1, 2006, the Oil & Gas Journal reported Wednesday. Russia's state-owned Rosneft, which currently ships oil to China by rail, is seeking permission to ship 1.2 million metric tons of oil via the pipeline next year. OAO Lukoil also is said to have shown interest in the pipeline. Meanwhile, China's Altaw Pass, where the final link in the pipeline was completed, is expected to become a hub for railway, road, and pipeline networks for the remote region in China's northwest. (UPI)

GEORGIAN SENATORS TO DRAW UP BLACK LIST OF RUSSIAN POLITICIANS

17 November

The Georgian parliament is going to ask the Georgian Foreign Ministry to draw up a so-called black list of Russian politicians who will be prohibited from entering Georgian territory. Work on drawing up such a list has already begun and it will be completed soon, Georgian Parliamentary Deputy Giga Bokeriya told journalists on Thursday. The parliament has not yet disclosed the names of the Russian politicians who may be included in the black list: however, they are likely to be Russian politicians who constantly visit Abkhazia and South Ossetia disregarding Georgian protests and without reviewing such trips with the Georgian authorities. Such a black list exists in Georgia, but it includes terrorists on the international wanted list, rather than politicians, Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Merab Antadze told journalists. (Interfax)

400 CIS OBSERVERS TO MONITOR KAZAKH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

17 November

Some 400 CIS observers will monitor the Kazakh presidential elections due on December 4, head of the

CIS observers mission at Kazakh presidential elections Yevgeny Sloboda said at a press conference in Astana. Sloboda said that the mission includes 42 permanent CIS observers. Moreover, Sloboda said observers from border regions will be invited to the upcoming elections. "In particular, observers from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will monitor the elections in Kazakh southern regions, Russia will monitor elections in northern districts, and Azerbaijani observers will monitor the elections in Aktau (in the west). Moreover, the mission is going to monitor polling stations abroad," he said. Sloboda said that the CIS mission will consist of representatives of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, parliamentary members of the Russian-Belarusian Union, representatives of the CIS diplomatic corps, deputies and election commissions members. "Representatives of all CIS members will monitor the elections, except Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, even though invitations were sent to them," Sloboda said. (Interfax)

US SOLDIERS FACE COURT MARTIAL

17 November

Two US soldiers charged with assaulting two Afghan detainees at a US base in southern Afghanistan will face court martial, the US military has said. The soldiers are accused of assaulting the detainees and making false statements, it said. The US military said the detainees who were allegedly assaulted were being temporarily held at a forward operating base in Uruzgan province. Rights groups have accused US forces of a number of abuses in Afghanistan. A press release issued by the combined forces command in Afghanistan said both soldiers face "multiple charges and specifications". "They include conspiracy to maltreat, dereliction of duty, maltreatment of detainees and assault consummated by battery," the release said. One of the soldiers faces "additional charges of making a false official statement and conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline and of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces", the release said. A third soldier is also facing "non-judicial punishment for allegedly having knowledge of the abuse and not reporting it through the unit's chain of

command", the release added. The detainees who were allegedly assaulted did not need medical attention, the US military said. The charges against the soldiers came in October close on the heels of accusations that US forces burned the bodies of Taliban fighters, an act considered sacrilege in Islam. The US military ordered an immediate investigation. US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the incident - if true - could harm the country's image abroad. Human rights groups have on a number of occasions accused US forces of abusing Afghans held at US detention centres in the country. At least eight prisoners have died in US custody since 2001. In September, a US military interrogator was sentenced to five months in prison for assaulting a detainee in Afghanistan who later died. Five other US soldiers have been convicted following the deaths of two prisoners at the military base at Bagram, outside Kabul, in 2002. (BBC)

NEW UZBEK DEFENCE CHIEF NAMED

18 November

Uzbekistan's hardline President Islam Karimov has named the head of the country's security council as his new defence minister. Ruslan Mirzayev got the job despite being one of 12 men named by the EU this week as subject to travel restrictions. The EU said the measure was a response to the Uzbek government's crackdown on the town of Andijan in May. Mr Mirzayev replaces Kodyr Gulyamov, who was also on the EU list. The Uzbek government says 187 people died in the Andijan unrest, which it blamed on Islamic militants. But rights groups say more than 500 people were killed, among them unarmed civilians shot by Uzbek security forces. The government has been strongly criticised for rejecting an international investigation into the incident. The travel restrictions can be lifted in certain situations. Another of the men on the list, Interior Minister Zakirjan Almatov, is believed to be in Germany receiving treatment for cancer. (BBC)

CHECHEN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN SLOVAKIA NOT MISTREATED - EMBASSY

18 November

The Slovak Embassy in Moscow has denied allegations made in the media that Chechen refugees arrested for illegally entering Slovakia are kept in prison-like camps near Bratislava. Media reports said

that about 40 Chechens staying in such camps were not permitted to leave their premises or to receive visitors, that they were dressed in convict's clothes, that guards with dogs escorted them to the canteen, that they received practically no medical assistance despite some of them, including children and pregnant women, being sick, that they were denied the services of lawyers and interpreters and that the camps looked like prisons. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN AIMS TO BE TOP URANIUM PRODUCER

18 November

Kazakhstan said Friday it plans to work with two Japanese companies to become the world's top uranium producer within five years. State-owned KazAtomProm will work with Sumitomo Corp. and Kansai Electric Power Co. to increase Kazakh uranium yearly output from 4,000 tons to 15,000 tons, thus exceeding the production of Canada's Cameco Corp., the world's current top uranium producer, KazAtomProm said in a statement. The company's head, Mukhtar Jakishev, said KazAtomProm planned to spend about \$600 million building new mines and upgrading existing ones. KazAtomProm is also negotiating such projects with the China National Nuclear Corp. and has plans to establish a joint venture with South Korean companies Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co. and Korea Resources Corp. (UPI)

KAZAKHSTAN, GEORGIA TO DRAFT AGREEMENT ON KAZAKH GAS SUPPLIES

18 November

The Georgian and Kazakh prime ministers agreed to start drafting an agreement on Kazakh natural gas supplies at a meeting in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana, the Georgian prime minister's office said Friday. Georgian premier Zurab Nogaideli and his Kazakh counterpart Danial Akhmetov said natural gas would be supplied to Georgia at mutually beneficial prices in coordinated volumes. Nogaideli said Georgia's natural gas needs would double or triple in the next few years in comparison with 2005. "Therefore, we are seeking to attain the maximum diversification of [our] natural gas sources, which does not rule out proactive cooperation with [Russian gas giant] Gazprom," the Georgian premier said. In 2004, Gazexport, a 100%-owned by Gazprom, supplied Georgia with 1.23 billion

cubic meters of natural gas, but relations have become strained because Gazprom wants to raise the price from the current \$62.5 per 1,000 cu m to \$110. (RIA Novosti)

MILITARY PROBING CHECHEN PM'S CAR CRASH

18 November

The military prosecutor's office of the Moscow Military District is investigating the car accident in which Chechen Prime Minister Sergei Abramov was injured, a prosecution service source said on Friday. "The reason for this decision is the fact that the car in which Abramov was traveling was being driven by a serviceman, a member of the Federal Bodyguard Service," the source told Interfax. (Interfax)

PROTESTS PLANNED AFTER SOLDIERS KILL THREE CHECHEN CIVILIANS

19 November

Rights groups plan large-scale protests in Chechnya in response to the November 16 killing of three Chechen civilians by Russian soldiers on the outskirts of the Chechen capital Grozny, Nurdi Nukhazhiyev, head of Chechnya's constitutional rights defense service, said on Saturday. The late night incident occurred on Said Baduyev Street on the outskirts of the village of Staraya Sunzha. "Persons in camouflage uniforms and masks who identified themselves as law enforcement officials arrested Yusup Usmanov, Khusain Akhmadov and Dzhambulat Dushayev and, without explanation, laid them on the ground and killed them by shooting each in the back of the head," the Grozny police authority told Interfax. The Russian Defense Ministry has admitted that the crime was committed by servicemen. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN TO REPAY \$849 MLN EARLY BY YEAR-END

21 November

Kazakhstan will repay ahead of schedule a total of \$849 million of its foreign debt by the end of this year, Finance Minister Arman Dunayev said on Monday. Dunayev told a government meeting that the early repayment would allow the Central Asian state to save \$209 million in debt servicing. Dunayev also said that the early debt repayment would allow the nation's monetary authorities to soak up excessive money

supply and keep quickening inflation in check. The minister did not name the borrowings which Kazakhstan would redeem early. The oil-rich nation's external debt guaranteed by the state stood at \$2.3 billion in the middle of this year, according to central bank data. The state external debt includes a \$350-million Eurobond due to mature in 2007. Kazakhstan's gross foreign debt, including debt issues by private firms, totalled \$34.6 billion in mid-2005, according to official data. (Reuters)

EBRD DEBATING UZBEKISTAN EXIT ON WORSENING POLITICS

21 November

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is debating closing down all its operations in Uzbekistan because of the deteriorating political situation there, a senior bank official told Reuters on Monday. The EBRD, the development bank for the region, said earlier this year it would stop funding public sector projects in the central Asian state, citing concern about incidents in May, when Uzbek forces opened fire on demonstrators in the town of Andizhan, killing scores of people. "For the time being, the EBRD's status is to invest only in the private sector in Uzbekistan," said Bruno Balvanera, head of business development at the EBRD. "But there is pressure from our shareholders to pull out completely and not engage in Uzbekistan at all." "We would like to stay in Tashkent but the political situation there is not good," he said on the sidelines of an investment conference in London. "There is an ongoing debate about this." Witnesses say over 500 people may have died in the Andizhan incident but the Uzbek government said 187 people -- mainly "foreign-paid terrorists" were killed. The incidents put a spotlight on human rights abuses in the mostly Muslim country of 24 million by President Islam Karimov's government. Several Uzbek men were sentenced to between 14 and 20 years for their role in the May incidents but Western countries and human rights groups have condemned the trial. The human rights issue has already prompted the EBRD to stopped funding projects in two other ex-Soviet states, Turkmenistan and Belarus. Balvanera said the EBRD's involvement in Uzbekistan has been shrinking in past years as the political situation weighed and economic reforms stalled. Just \$40 million is likely to be invested

in 2005, similar to last year's levels, he added. "In practical terms, our operations in Uzbekistan are already much reduced -- there is not much difference between doing \$40 million and doing nothing at all," he said. (Reuters)

LAST US PLANE LEAVES UZBEK BASE

21 November

The US has flown its last plane out of an air base in Uzbekistan that has been an important staging point for US military operations in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan in July gave the US six months to leave the base, after it joined international condemnation of the suppression of a May uprising. In a ceremony, troops lowered the US flag and handed to Uzbek officials the keys to the Karshi-Khanabad base. Some personnel remain at the base, which the US has occupied since 2001. "We are still performing some small operations on the base," US Central Command spokesman Joe Vermette told the Associated Press news agency. A Pentagon spokesman said troops had been withdrawing from the base over the past several months. It is not clear when the last troops will leave. The US and other Western countries called for an international investigation into the events in the Uzbek city of Andijan earlier this year. The Uzbek government says 187 people, mostly "terrorist organisers", died during the unrest. Human rights groups say 500 or more civilians may have been shot by Uzbek security forces. (BBC)

AZERI OIL STRIKERS RETURN TO WORK

23 November

More than a thousand oil workers have returned to work in Azerbaijan after staging a 24-hour strike in protest at their pay and working conditions. The workers, employed by US oil services firm McDermott, barricaded themselves in a factory near Baku used to construct oil rigs for BP. The workers claimed they have been stopped from forming a trade union and have no access to healthcare. McDermott said it would investigate the workers' grievances. About 1,500 staff took control of the plant, 40 miles from Baku, on Tuesday and refused to allow management into the site. The fabrication plant is used to build offshore oil rigs and other equipment for BP drilling operations in the oil-rich Caspian Sea. The staff claim they are paid far less than foreign workers

in the country's booming oil industry, earning about \$2 an hour. They also allege that they have no access to health insurance or compensation if they are injured at work. A BP spokesman said it had been told staff returned to work on Wednesday while McDermott had agreed to investigate the workers' concerns and report back within a week. McDermott had previously said that the strikers' claims over a lack of insurance were not true. The dispute is politically sensitive since the oil industry is a major source of employment and income for the country. Critics claim that Western companies have too much power over the industry while ordinary Azeris are not benefiting from the country's extensive oil resources. The BBC correspondent in Azerbaijan said that although the current strike action had ended, she believed trust had broken down between workers and management and further disputes were possible. The strike illustrated the growth in anti-Western sentiment in the country, she added. (BBC)

ENERGY CRISIS GRIPS TAJIK REGION

24 November

Tajik Energy Ministry spokesman Nozir Yodgori confirmed on 24 November that a complete power blackout has struck northern Sughd province after a cutoff of electricity and gas supplies from neighboring Uzbekistan. Yodgori also warned that a steep reduction in the water level of the Norak reservoir threatens to lead to a new energy crisis in Tajikistan within two months. He added that although electricity rationing has been introduced in the region, limiting daily electricity to just three hours, the country still needs some \$90 million to cover its energy shortfall. The cut in power supplies from Uzbekistan is reportedly linked to stalled negotiations in Tashkent between Tajik energy officials and Uzbek suppliers. (Asia-Plus)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT OFFERS TO SHIP NATURAL GAS TO GERMANY

24 November

Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Niyazov told German businessmen that his gas-rich country could export natural gas to Germany but only with Russia's approval, state-controlled television reported Thursday. Niyazov told the visiting delegation on Wednesday that Turkmenistan could export up to 30

billion cubic meters (1,059 billion cubic feet) of gas to Western Europe via the "Central Asia-Center" pipeline going from Turkmenistan to Russia, according to Turkmen television. The question is, Niyazov said in televised remarks, "will Russia allow us to do it?" The former Soviet republic, which is ruled with an iron fist by Niyazov, has stepped up efforts to export its vast gas wealth. The visiting German delegation included Klaus Mangold, an executive adviser to automotive giant Daimler-Chrysler. Germany in recent years has sought to secure a more reliable gas supply for its consumers. In September, then-Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder sealed a major agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin to build a pipeline under the Baltic Sea. Currently, most of Germany's -- and Europe's -- gas imports go through pipelines traversing Poland and Belarus or Ukraine, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Russia supplies a third of Germany's gas and a quarter of Europe's. (AP)

NATO TRIES TO ALLAY AFGHAN SECURITY FEARS

25 November

NATO allies are in intensive talks to allay security concerns among nations key to a plan to expand peacekeeping in Afghanistan amid growing violence there, alliance sources said on Friday. The Netherlands, one of three nations earmarked to lead the expansion into the more dangerous southern region in the first half of next year, has raised questions over whether NATO will have sufficient forces to handle serious trouble, they said. NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer is due on Monday to meet New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, who insists she will not transfer to NATO a 120-strong reconstruction team in Bamiyan province unless the alliance guarantees robust support. "The Dutch want reassurance. If things go wrong, they want to be sure that there are others out there who can help them," said one NATO source who requested anonymity. "The Dutch are in daily contact with allies and we shall see how this goes," said a NATO official. "The secretary-general is fully aware of the discussion taking place in the Netherlands." A spokesman said Dutch Defense Minister Henk Kamp was still weighing up security and other considerations. A decision to deploy 1,100 Dutch troops to southern

Afghanistan would require parliamentary approval, he added. The NATO-led ISAF mission currently has some 9,000 troops in the capital Kabul and the relatively calm north and west. The move to the south will raise troop numbers to 15,000 and allow the U.S.-led coalition to cut the size of its force there. Britain, Canada and the Netherlands have expressed a desire to share the lead in the expansion. Aside from New Zealand, there are also talks with non-NATO nations including Australia. Recent weeks have seen a rise in violence, including attacks aimed at ISAF troops and evidence that Taliban insurgents are resorting to suicide bomb attacks in their campaign to drive foreign troops out of the country. Four Spanish ISAF soldiers were wounded on Friday when a mine blast hit their convoy on the outskirts of the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif. It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack but suspicion fell on Taliban guerrillas. (Reuters)

AZERBAIJAN POLICE BREAK UP OPPOSITION PROTEST

26 November

Police in Azerbaijan's capital used truncheons and water cannon on Saturday to break up a protest by opposition supporters complaining of fraud in an election earlier this month. A Reuters reporter at the scene said he saw dozens of protesters with blood coming from head wounds after riot police moved in to disperse a crowd of about 10,000 people in a square on the outskirts of Baku. Police said the protesters were breaking the law. But the violent scenes may create added discomfort for Ilham Aliyev, the president of the oil-producing state who is already facing Western criticism over the November 6 parliamentary vote. "A lot of our people have been hurt," Ali Kerimli, one of the leaders of the main Azadlyq opposition bloc, who was at the protest, told Reuters by telephone. "We did not break the law. We were having a peaceful protest which ended when police started to beat up unarmed people." In fellow ex-Soviet states Georgia and Ukraine, street protests over disputed elections forced out the ruling elites. But analysts say Azerbaijan's opposition does not have the popular support to pull off a similar revolution. Police intervened after demonstrators, who demand the election results be overturned and a new vote held, refused to leave the square when the time the

authorities had allocated for their rally ran out. Most people ran away but sections of the crowd fought back with stones and wooden poles, leading to brief pitched battles in the streets surrounding the square. Opposition parties have been holding frequent demonstrations since the election, which Western observers said was marred by ballot-rigging. The protests until now were peaceful. The vote handed a big majority in parliament to supporters of President Aliyev, who succeeded his father Haydar in an election in 2003. That vote was also followed by violent clashes between police and opposition supporters. Azerbaijan, a Muslim ex-Soviet state which borders Russia and Iran, supplies growing volumes of oil to world markets from its fields in the Caspian Sea. A multibillion dollar pipeline built by a BP-led consortium is due to start pumping crude from Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean early next year. (AP)

OVER 120 KILOS OF HEROIN SEIZED ON TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER

27 November

More than 120 kilograms of heroin were seized on the Tajik-Afghan border near Parkhar, 250 kilometers southwest of Dushanbe, Abdulsattor Gulakhmatov, press secretary of the Tajik state border guard committee, told Interfax on Sunday. Border guards fired on a group illegally crossing the border, he said. "One man, an Afghan citizen, was detained. The others managed to escape, leaving behind 112 plastic bags with heroin weighing over 120 kilograms," Gulakhmatov said. More than 1.8 tonnes of drugs, among them over 920 kilograms of heroin, have been seized on the Tajik-Afghan border in 2005. Earlier this year, Russia handed over control over the 1,344-kilometer border with Afghanistan to Tajikistan. Russian border guards were deployed in the area under an intergovernmental agreement signed in 1993. (Interfax)

HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS SKEPTICAL ON CHECHNYA VOTE

27 November

Human rights campaigners said they doubt Sunday's parliamentary elections in Chechnya will restore peace in the republic. "We do not have sufficient grounds to expect the elections to lead to fundamental positive changes in Chechnya," Human Rights Watch Moscow

office chief Alexander Petrov told Interfax on Sunday. A lack of security is one of the main problems facing the republic, he said. "Chechnya has not become safer than it was at the beginning of the year. So far no noticeable changes have taken place from the point of view of security and improving people's lives," Petrov said. Moscow Helsinki Group head Lyudmila Alexeyeva told Interfax that leading human rights organizations chose not to send their observers to Chechnya. "The Moscow Helsinki Group is not monitoring these elections because we do not have enough money to pay our observers. But, frankly speaking, I have not tried to find the money. Judging from what we saw during the republic's previous elections, I know that elections in Chechnya are a farce. It is pointless to monitor them," she said. (Interfax)

US CONDEMNS AZERI RALLY POLICING

27 November

The US has censured the use of force to disperse crowds in Azerbaijan's capital Baku on Saturday who were protesting about recent parliamentary elections. A statement by the US embassy in Baku said it deplored the "unjustified and unprovoked use of force". Many people were reported to have been injured by police using truncheons, tear gas and water cannon. The opposition say the results giving President Ilham Aliyev's party overwhelming victory were falsified. Leaders of the opposition United Freedom Bloc have insisted on a re-run of the vote. Saturday saw the first use of police force against a rally since the 6 November election. Hundreds of policemen in full riot gear had lined the edges of Victory Square for the latest of a series of tightly controlled demonstrations. "We deplore the unjustified and unprovoked use of force against citizens peacefully exercising their right to freedom of assembly," said the statement issued by the US embassy in Baku. Police chiefs said only one demonstrator sustained injuries, while 20 officers were seriously hurt. They branded the demonstrators, who defied a two-hour limit on their rally, as "provocateurs" and denied using water cannons or tear gas. "They were calling for disobedience... we warned them," said Baku deputy police chief Yashar Aliyev. He said 29 people were arrested, including a leader of the opposition Liberal party. Many activists, inspired

by Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" of a year ago and believing the time has come to put more pressure on the government, had called for an open-ended protest. But President Aliyev, son of the late Heydar Aliyev, says that in his oil-rich state the chances of such a revolution are zero. (BBC)

HEAD OF PACE DELEGATION DOUBTS VALIDITY OF CHECHEN ELECTIONS

28 November

Head of a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to Chechnya Andreas Gross has doubted the correctness of parliamentary elections in conditions when people are being killed and abducted in the republic. The real authorities, law enforcement bodies, are intimidating people, so it is difficult to evaluate the elections in such conditions, even if they are technically correct, he said at a Monday meeting with Chechen President Alu Alkhanov in Grozny. He said that in Chechnya delegation members met ordinary people. They talked to three women - one elderly, one middle aged and one young who were going to vote and were all scared, he said. Members of their families had been killed and the women did not know what had happened to their children, Gross said. The women were sure that law enforcement personnel were involved, he said. In his opinion, such actions undermine the foundations of government. Gross expressed willingness to help the legitimate authorities and to promote strengthening them, because only legitimate authorities can protect people. (Interfax)

UNITED RUSSIA LEADING IN CHECHEN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

28 November

United Russia is leading in Chechen parliamentary elections. "United Russia ranks first and is almost unreachable for other regional organizations of parties that took part in the Chechen parliament elections," Chechen Elections Commission Chairman Ismail Baikhanov told a Monday press conference in Grozny. Official tallies from 237 of 430 polling stations had been processed by noon, and gave United Russia 61.45% of votes, he said. The Communist Party is second with 11.99% of votes. The Union of Right Forces ranks third with 10.93%, followed by the Eurasian Union with 4.17% of votes, Baikhanov said.

Yabloko has 3.31%, and People's Will has the smallest rating at just over 1%. Baikhanov said that the information is preliminary, and they will have to wait for information from other polling stations. The election commission must post official results within two weeks of the voting, he said. (Interfax)

FORMER KYRGYZ MINISTERS LOSE IN PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION ...AS FORMER PROSECUTOR-GENERAL REGAINS LOST SEAT

29 November

Results from a parliamentary by-election in the Tunduk district of northern Bishkek indicated on 28 November that former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva and former Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev were among those defeated by Finance Ministry official Janysh Kudaibergenov. In the southern Aksy district of Kyrgyzstan, Azimbek Beknazarov secured about 89 percent of the vote in a 28 November by-election for a second vacant seat in the Kyrgyz parliament, according to RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service. Beknazarov originally resigned the seat that he won in the February parliamentary elections to become acting prosecutor-general. He was dismissed from that post in September and ran again to regain the same legislative seat. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION CANDIDATE OUTLINES CAMPAIGN PLATFORM

29 November

The leader of the For a Just Kazakhstan opposition bloc, Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, outlined his presidential campaign platform in a 28 November televised speech, Kazakh Television reported. Speaking in a 15-minute address featuring video images of impoverished Kazakh families, Tuyakbai vowed to fight poverty, corruption, and injustice. He concluded by warning that "we are turning into a country of sharp contrasts where a social division might lead to an explosion in the future and opposition," with closing video footage showing Kazakh officials on a golf course, riding in expensive foreign cars, and at luxury hotels. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH ELECTORAL OFFICIAL PLEDGES GREATER VOTING TRANSPARENCY

29 November

Kazakh Central Electoral Commission Chairman Onalsyn Zhumabekov vowed on 28 November to ensure greater voting transparency in the country's upcoming presidential election, Interfax reported. In a meeting in Astana with U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan John Ordway, Zhumabekov reported that initial results from the presidential balloting will be released within 24 hours of the closing of polls. In another move seemingly intended to improve the conduct of the 4 December election, the electoral commission on 28 November reversed its earlier decree introducing the use of special ballot envelopes for the election, according to Interfax. Electoral Commission Chairman Zhumabekov explained that although such "envelopes were used during the last election to the Mazhilis [the lower house of parliament], there are opinions being voiced to the effect that envelopes may be used by some unscrupulous participants in the electoral process" for illegal ballot stuffing. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI OIL WORKERS LAUNCH NEW STRIKE

29 November

Azerbaijani employees of McDermott Caspian Contractors Inc. (MCCI) launched a second strike on 28 November to protest the company management's rejection of their demand for higher wages. Some 2,000 Azerbaijani employees of MCCI staged a one-day stoppage last week to demand the same wages as foreign workers with the same qualifications. The strikers rejected an offer by MCCI managers to raise wages by 12 percent beginning in January 2006 but also

to increase the working week from 45 hours to 50 hours beginning on 5 December. Workers from a second Western corporation have also joined the strike. (day.az)

CHECHEN LEADER ANNOUNCES TALKS WITH UNNAMED RESISTANCE REPRESENTATIVES

29 November

Pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Alu Alkhanov told journalists in Grozny on 29 November he plans to meet "soon" in Brussels with unnamed representatives of the Chechen regime formerly headed by President Aslan Maskhadov. Alkhanov affirmed that "the policy of reconciliation will be continued, and we are open [for talks with] those who want peace." But he ruled out including in the Brussels talks Akhmed Zakaev, whom he denounced as "a criminal." Maskhadov's successor Abdul-Khalim Sadullaev in August named Zakaev as deputy chairman of the Chechen Council of Ministers and as his representative for peace talks. Zakaev for his part said in a statement posted 29 November on www.chechenpress.org that the legitimate Chechen leadership will not participate in any talks with those persons, including Alkhanov, whose official position in Chechnya depends on "Russian bayonets." "Alkhanov did not begin this war, he is not waging it, and it is not within his power to end it," Zakaev commented, adding that the resistance is "tirelessly seeking" to begin talks with Moscow with the aim of ending the conflict. (RFE/RL)

