

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING

VOL. 8 NO. 20

18 OCTOBER 2006

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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

BACKGROUND: 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-450 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

CONCLUSIONS: 100-200 words that strongly state your conclusions about the impact of the event or issue.

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

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THE CSTO DEEPENS MILITARY TIES

Richard Weitz

In late August, after formally designating Uzbekistan as a full member, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) held its largest military exercise of the year. The organization has also succeeded in strengthening its relations with other international institutions, including the International Organization for Migration and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Relations with NATO, however, remain problematic. Different members want different things from the CSTO, however, and it is not yet clear whether it will evolve into an organization that will also protect the incumbency of member regimes.

BACKGROUND: The scenario for exercise Rubezh-2006 (“Frontier-2006”), which occurred between August 24 and 29, posited a major terrorist attack against a member government as well as opportunistic behavior by other countries. The three sides were the “reds” (CSTO members); the “blues” (armed terrorist formations seeking to establish a Central Asian caliphate); and the “browns” (countries seeking to exploit the situation to expand their regional influence). CSTO officials often describe NATO leaders as having such ambitions.

Rubezh-2006 involved some 2,500 troops from CSTO members Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The first and second stages involved joint command and staff exercises. In the third operational phase, however, dozens of armored vehicles, artillery pieces, combat aircraft, and warships engaged in a simulated combined airborne-amphibious assault near the town of Aktau on Kazakhstan’s Caspian coastline.

The exercise saw two innovations. First, it included all branches of the CSTO armed forces, including the ground forces of the four countries involved as well as the navies and air forces of both Russia and Kazakhstan. The CSTO’s main standing unit, its Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF), also participated. Second, the exercise involved all the CSTO’s major command and control components – its permanent combined staff, institutional secretariat, and

the new CRDF standing joint headquarters, established two months earlier.

CRDF units have engaged in several major exercises in the past, including the CSTO’s two previous annual anti-terrorist exercises – Rubezh-2004 in Kyrgyzstan in August 2004, and Rubezh-2005 in Tajikistan in April 2005. The CSTO also provides for the mobilization of larger multinational military formations in the event of external aggression. A protocol adopted earlier this year identifies three such groups: an East European Group (between Russia and Belarus); a Caucasian Group (between Russia and Armenia); and a Central Asian Group (which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and now Uzbekistan). The Belarusian-Russian group held a major joint command-post exercise, Shchit Soyuzza-2006 (“Union Shield-2006”), in June 2006.

IMPLICATIONS: In 1999 Uzbekistan, along with Azerbaijan and Georgia, suspended their membership in the 1992 Collective Security Treaty (CST) that underpins the CSTO. After the Uzbek government signed a protocol committing it to undertake all CSTO membership obligations, CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha told the media on August 17 this year that “from this moment Uzbekistan is a full-fledged member of the CSTO, de facto and de jure.” Although Uzbek officials began actively working with CSTO structures in June, their involvement occurred too late for the Uzbek armed forces to participate in the

planning or conduct of the exercise. Like the other two nonparticipating members, Armenia and Belarus (which currently holds the rotating CSTO chair), Uzbekistan instead sent military observers.

With its admission, Uzbekistan is eligible to purchase Russian weapons and send officers for training in Russian military institutions on a subsidized basis. These benefits are especially important given the U.S. and EU arms embargo imposed on Uzbekistan. Tashkent spends more on defense than any other Central Asian country, including regularly paying hard currency to educate dozens of its military officers each year in Russian schools.

Bordyuzha expects the Uzbek armed forces to contribute combat forces to the CRDF. In addition, Uzbekistan's entry makes implementing the organization's long-discussed proposals to send CSTO units into Afghanistan to combat Taliban fighters and drug traffickers more plausible. Any major military intervention would require access to Uzbekistan's defense facilities.

An important CSTO function became clearer this year. In response to a question at a June 2006 session of the Russian Duma about rumored U.S. plans to deploy ballistic missile defenses (BMD) in Kazakhstan, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that CSTO members were obliged to inform one another of their foreign military ties. He noted that the Kyrgyz government had accordingly briefed its partners about the negotiations with Washington regarding the renewal of the U.S. military base at Kyrgyzstan's Manas International Airport. Lavrov expressed confidence that Kazakhstan would inform other CSTO governments about any plans to deploy American BMD assets on its territory. CSTO governments clearly value how the organization promotes mutual military transparency and consultations regarding foreign military activities in member states.

In addition, the CSTO has been deepening ties with other international institutions active in Central Asia. In August 2006, Bordyuzha said that the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were drafting a protocol to extend their collaboration, which thus far has remained largely confined to contacts

between the SCO Regional Counterterrorism Center and the CSTO's own antiterrorist experts. Enhanced cooperation would increase the effectiveness of their efforts to address terrorism, narcotics smuggling, and other shared concerns in Central Asia.

The CSTO has also taken recent steps to strengthen ties with the Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec). At the August 15-17 Eurasec summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed the interconnection between national security and economic prosperity. Although discussions continue among member governments regarding possible cooperative projects, the Russian and Central Asian media have speculated about a possible future merger of the two institutions.

On July 26, the CSTO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) agreed to cooperate to counter illegal migration, including human trafficking, within CSTO member states. In May and June of this year, the CSTO conducted its first joint operation against illegal migration in member countries. CSTO officials argue that, as with the narcotics trade, trafficking in people generates revenue for terrorist groups and allows them to infiltrate operatives and weapons into targeted countries.

At a press conference marking the CSTO-IOM agreement, Bordyuzha raised the issue of the tense relations between Russia and non-member Georgia. He denounced perceived threats by the Georgian government to use force in the Kodori Gorge, noting that the fighting in the early 1990s generated a wave of refugees into CSTO member Russia. The Georgian Foreign Ministry subsequently dismissed Bordyuzha's suggestion that the CSTO could contribute peacekeepers to prevent renewed fighting in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The statement chastised Bordyuzha for "forgetting" that, because Georgia withdrew from the military arrangements of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1999, CSTO decisions "carry no force on the territory of Georgia." Since the CSTO troops would merely replace or supplement the existing Russian peacekeepers, their main function would be to bolster the legitimacy of a mission widely criticized outside of Russia for being biased and ineffective.

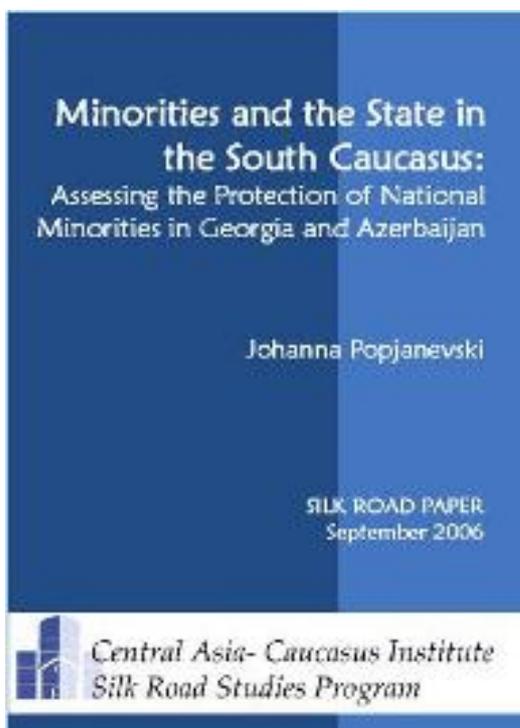
CSTO's relations with one institution, NATO, remain unresolved. CSTO leaders still see the Atlantic Alliance as both a potential partner and a potential adversary. Since late 2003, CSTO officials, strongly supported by the Russian government, have tried to initiate joint programs with the Atlantic Alliance. NATO officials, noting Moscow's dominance of the organization, have resisted developing formal ties with the CSTO as a collective organization, preferring instead to rely on direct contacts with its individual member governments. More recently, Bordyuzha and other CSTO officials have openly complained about further NATO expansion plans and its military activities near Russia and Belarus. If not motivated by pique, these statements could indicate their assessment that only by becoming more confrontational will they get NATO to start taking the CSTO more seriously – a worrisome sign for the future.

CONCLUSIONS: Although the presidents of Armenia and Belarus have expressed the largest interest in securing CSTO assistance against possible conventional foreign attacks, other members appear

more concerned with using the CSTO to counter what Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov has termed “new types of threats,” such as terrorist attacks and nuclear proliferation. For this reason, while the CSTO governments have made considerable progress in antiterrorist cooperation, they have yet to specify how members would implement Article 4 of the CST, which refers to mutual military assistance should a signatory come under attack from a third party.

The Rubezh-2006 exercise scenario also raises the intriguing question as to whether the member governments might seek to activate CSTO military intervention to counter domestic threats. Recent developments suggest that at least some CSTO members want to transform the institution into a Warsaw Pact-like alliance that tries to guarantee the incumbency of its pro-Moscow leaders.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Richard Weitz is a Senior Fellow and Associate Director of the Center for Future Security Strategies at the Hudson Institute.



New Silk Road Paper!

Minorities and the State: Assessing the Protection of National Minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan

by Johanna Popjanevski

This 88-page Silk Road Paper analyzes the protection of minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan, against the background of the ambition by both states to develop an inclusive, civic concept of nationhood.

The paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

THE POLITICS OF FRANCE'S CRIMINALIZATION OF GENOCIDE DENIAL

Emil Souleimanov

On October 12, a bill criminalizing “denial of the Armenian Genocide” was passed by the French National Assembly. This step was initiated by the influential Armenian diaspora, which argues that 1,5 millions ethnic Armenians were killed in the Ottoman Empire as a result of the state-promoted policies of obliteration of its Armenian subjects. Ankara, strongly denying allegations of Genocide, has protested the bill by withdrawing its ambassador from Paris, canceling or threatening to cancel contracts with French companies worth billions of dollars. Along some EU member states’ claims that recognition of Genocide by Ankara should be a precondition for Turkey’s EU accession, has shown the importance of the issue, which has long ago become a political one.

BACKGROUND: Although Armenian diasporas scattered around the world have long tended to push their countries of residence to recognize the alleged Armenian genocide in legal terms, this gained momentum as a national priority issue in the aftermath of Robert Kocharyan’s coming to power in Armenia in 1998.

The reason for adopting this new policy were manifold. First, president Kocharyan, a native of Mountainous Karabakh with strong ties to the Russian military, saw as his main task to improve national unity, which was gradually reduced in domestic squabbles in the wake of Armenia’s victory over Azerbaijan in the 1988-1994 war. Supported by nationalists and the Kremlin, Kocharyan replaced former president Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who was forced to resign due to his apparent willingness to make serious concessions to Baku on the Karabakh issue. Kocharyan’s policies worsened chances of a resolution to the conflict, further contributing to frustration in Azerbaijan and increasing calls there for a military solution. Importantly, the images of the Turks and Azerbaijanis have been made to increasingly coincide in Armenian society, both being regarded as “Turks”. The systematic exploitation of the genocide issue is linked with this, as it has a strong mobilization potential and is key to nail the link between Armenians in the Republic and those in the

diaspora. Being central to Armenian nationalism, it is also believed to slow the assimilation of the young generations of diaspora Armenians and improve their attachment to the Armenian homeland. Kocharyan’s recent steps to allow dual citizenship should be seen in this light.

Partly as a consequence of the aim of cultivating the image of an external enemy, substantial financial aid from diaspora Armenians to Armenia and Karabakh intensified in recent years. Armenian diasporas in Russia, America, France and elsewhere have worked ever more closely with the Armenian state, especially as regards genocide recognition issues. Starting from 1998, a new wave of countries in Europe and America have seen various authorities recognize the massacres of 1915 as genocide. In brief, this policy is expected to strengthen Kocharyan’s position in the country where strong objections prevail to his regime’s legitimacy.

Yerevan’s objective to achieve genocide recognition by the international community have had a momentous international dimension. Importantly, the series of states recognizing the massacres as Genocide creates a group of states to which Ankara is anxious to use reciprocal means. This in turn contributes to the worsening of Turkish relations with those states and isolating itself on the international scene. Naturally, the more states

recognize the massacres as genocide, the stronger the international pressure on Ankara to follow suit. With the crucial assistance of its diasporas in the EU states, Armenia seeks to tie Turkish genocide recognition directly with the prospects of Turkey's entrance into the EU.

In backroom talks, Armenian strategists admit that under certain historical circumstances, Yerevan might invoke the issue of "regaining the territories of Western Armenia", as Armenians refer to several provinces in Eastern Turkey. This very ambitious project could become realistic only in the event of Turkey's disintegration. Some circles in Armenia and elsewhere speculate this could happen in the next 40 to 50 years if the long-standing demographical boom in Kurdish-populated areas continues, which could lead the numbers of Turks and Kurds in Turkey to even out, while the growth of Kurdish nationalism and separatism alongside the ongoing establishment of a *de facto* Kurdish political entity in Northern Iraq complicates matters. Of course, Armenian analysts of this persuasion neglect the key fact that the areas they consider to be Western Armenia are now inhabited by millions of primarily Kurdish people who consider these territories their own. Hence there is little hope that even in the remote – not to say delirious – proposition of Turkey falling apart, these inhabitants would show much understanding for Armenia's age-long aspirations. A more modest expectation, shared by many more Armenians, is seeking compensation from the Turkish state for the lives and properties of the murdered Armenians by their descendants.

IMPLICATIONS: Whether Ankara proceeds to genocide recognition or not, this will have serious implications for the nature of the Turkish state. In fact, the modern Republic was built by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his fellowmen in clear opposition to the Ottoman Empire, and does not consider itself the latter's successor *per se*. Furthermore, the massacres of Armenians were carried out while a narrow group of high-ranked Young Turks (Enver, Talaat, Cemal) *de facto* ruled the country during the World War I. To recognize a

purported genocide carried out by a non-existent state and a despised former leadership, and to bring formal condolences about it may seem to be the easiest way out the situation.

Yet this prospect, seemingly logical to outsiders, neglects both growing nationalism in Turkey and the role of the Turkish military. Indeed, the Army is considered the guarantor of the Republic's secular character, its independence and unity, and hence has a nimbus of holiness. A "defilement" of the Turkish Army by admitting the to a genocide is thus completely unacceptable for the influential Turkish military brass and large numbers of Turks. The top brass, moreover, consider genocide recognition would not only disgrace the army but also bring about far-reaching effects for the country's sacred unity.

A number of EU member states, opposing Turkish EU membership for various reasons, seem to have incorporated genocide recognition along with other issues such as Kurdish rights and Turkey's Muslim identity to their agenda. These countries, including France and Austria, appear to view the Armenian question more as a way to stop Turkey than an issue in its own right. As accession talks intensify in the years to come, this trend could easily gain salience.

This has already led to a certain modification of Ankara's view on what happened to the Armenians



Turkish Prime Minister
Recep Tayyip Erdogan

in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish position now acknowledges that up to 300,000 Armenians, just like hundreds of thousands of Ottoman citizens regardless of their ethnic origins, lost their lives in Eastern Anatolia as a result of civil warfare, diseases

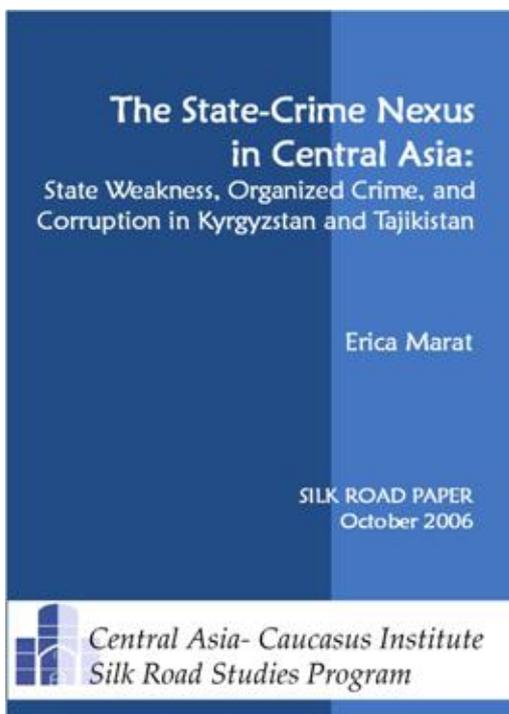
and famine that afflicted the countryside during the first world war. Recent commentaries even admit that many Armenians died as a consequence of their forced displacement from war zones into the Syrian Desert. Yet though some Turkish voices do use the term “massacres”, official outlets stress the point that no state-sanctioned policy of genocide existed. In recent years, some Turkish historians and part of the country’s intellectual elite, based mainly outside Turkey, have called on Ankara for recognize the genocide. Yet resistance against such claims is compact. Similarly, in Armenia the reverse picture is true: even references to the killings of thousands of Turks and Azerbaijanis by Armenian nationalists in Eastern Anatolia and Armenia proper during the first world war and its aftermath are a strict taboo.

Turkish society remains heavily uninformed about the topic; its rather neutral attitude towards Armenians turns negative only in the reaction to what is considered “Armenian lies”, as well as in relation to the Karabakh issue, in which the Turks side with their Azerbaijani Turkic brethren.

CONCLUSIONS: With its long-term goals remaining vague and hardly predictable, Yerevan’s stance to have the international community

recognize the massacres of 1915 as genocide have contributed to a visible deterioration of Armenian-Turkish relations, and hence increased Armenia’s one-sided dependence on Russia, which is seen as the country’s only security guarantor vis-à-vis hostile Turkey. Accordingly, in an effort to ensure a devoted ally in the strategic South Caucasus region, Moscow is thoroughly opposing a rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey, just as it opposes a resolution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute. Whereas the Karabakh conflict has considerably limited Yerevan’s space of maneuver in the Caucasus, the genocide recognition issue has done very much the same in Armenia’s relationship with its Western neighbor, pushing Ankara into Baku’s firm embrace.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Dr. Emil Souleimanov is senior lecturer at the Department of International Relations, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic. He is author of “An Endless War: The Russian-Chechen Conflict in Perspective” (Peter Lang, autumn 2006)



New Silk Road Paper!

The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

by Erica Marat

This paper analyzes the divergent forms that relationships between organized crime and the state have taken in the two worst hit Central Asian states in the past decade.

This 138-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

UZBEKISTAN REJOINS THE CSTO: ARE RUSSIAN-UZBEK RELATIONS HEADING TOWARD MUTUAL ENTRAPMENT?

Matteo Fumagalli

On 16 August 2006, Uzbekistan re-joined the Collective Security Treaty Organization, one of the many institutional frameworks set up following the Soviet demise in Central Eurasia, from which it had withdrawn in 1999. In the Russian seaside resort of Sochi, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the presidents of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan had signed an agreement on Uzbekistan's membership. Earlier this year, in June, Uzbekistan had announced its intention to suspend the moratorium on its membership. This signals a further moment of rapprochement between Tashkent and Moscow, on top of an alliance treaty signed in November 2005 and a wide range of commercial agreements between the two countries and various Russian companies.

BACKGROUND: The Collective Security Treaty was signed in Tashkent in May 1992 and entered into force in 1994. Uzbekistan was one of the founding members of the organization, along with Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Belarus, Georgia and Azerbaijan later also adhered to it.

The CST was originally envisaged as an institutional framework to ensure collective security in a moment when the former Soviet states were still in the process of establishing their own separate armies and defense structures. It soon became apparent, however, that grandiose rhetoric was not followed by actual policy moves and the treaty became one among many void post-Soviet institutional frameworks. Uzbekistan's gradual distancing from Russia and re-alignment towards Western organizations was marked by Tashkent's withdrawal from the CST in April 1999 and the country's entry three months later into GUAM, the organization including Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUUAM after Uzbekistan entered the organization), commonly

perceived as a more pro-Western (or anti-Russian) organization. Post-9/11 developments brought Uzbekistan and the West even closer, and Tashkent and Washington signed a Strategic Partnership in June 2002.

In the meantime, the CST had evolved into a proper military-political organization changing its name to CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) in May 2002. The revitalized organization posed increased emphasis on cooperation in the field of regional security, particularly with regard to combating the spread of radical Islamism, trafficking in narcotics, and arms smuggling.

Interestingly, unlike Uzbekistan's withdrawal from GU(U)AM, where Tashkent denounced the organization's document, in the case of the CST(O) Uzbekistan had simply called for a moratorium on the country's active membership, as it was pointed out in Sochi. By revoking the moratorium and expressing the intention to regain full membership, Uzbekistan was merely 'catching up' after a pause. As the Uzbek news agency Uzreport reported on 16 August, President Karimov referred to the CSTO as

a 'much needed structure'. He followed this up by emphasizing how the improvement of economy and security are closely connected, hence hinting at the possible future integration of the Eurasian Economic Community, which Uzbekistan joined earlier this year, and the CSTO.

IMPLICATIONS: The 'Andijan events' (where security forces fired at a large crowd of protesters, killing a number of them) brought Uzbekistan's relations with the West to an unprecedented low level. As western human rights organizations and Western governments criticized Tashkent's handling of the events, President Karimov made the point loud and clear that despite Western criticism, 'Uzbekistan was not alone'. Indeed it was not, as the wide backing received by Russia, China, Pakistan and other Asian countries testifies.

What seems contradictory, however, is that Uzbekistan's increasing and seemingly limitless coziness to Moscow runs against President Karimov's own thesis, proposed in his latest literary fatigue, entitled 'The Uzbek will not depend on anything or anyone'. So, has President Karimov simply contradicted himself and fifteen years of Uzbekistani foreign policy?

While Tashkent has certainly sought to maintain good relations with other countries, it is with Moscow that Tashkent has chosen to align itself very closely. It is all too easy to point to regime survival as the driving force behind Tashkent's realignment. Less straightforward are the implications of such a move. In particular, questions arise as to the margins of political autonomy left to Uzbekistan after yet another move towards a closer embrace with the Kremlin. Over the past year, Uzbekistan has signed an alliance treaty with Russia, entered the Eurasian Economic Community, and re-joined the CSTO. On top of all this, extensive investments have been made in the country by Russian companies, particularly in the gas and oil sectors. It is not just regarding Tashkent's margins of autonomy that questions

arise. If on the one hand Moscow's attempt to bring most of Central Asia back under its sphere of influence is well motivated by President Putin's renewed attempt to make Russia count internationally, and rather effectively so at least as far as post-communist Eurasia is concerned, on the other hand the ever closer Russian-Uzbek relationship restricts not only Tashkent's options, but Moscow's too. Continuous security guarantees, sanctioned by the alliance treaty and now restated in the Uzbek recent membership in the CSTO, essentially make Russian security entrenched in the Uzbek domestic situation. Should the country be further destabilized, it would not be inconceivable to expect a Russian military involvement. The problem is that Moscow's widely perceived close association with the current administration in Tashkent would not allow the Kremlin to appear as a broker or neutral player, and hence an attack against the ruling elites and possibly a replacement of them could damage Russia's interests there in the long run.

CONCLUSIONS: Sovereignty and independence have traditionally been the pillars in Uzbekistan's state-building efforts and by extension, in its foreign policy-making. At the same time, the ruling elites have also kept an eye on how to retain political autonomy, that is, to avoid entrapment in one or the other alliance system. As domestic turmoil became more frequent and combined with new perceptions of externally-driven threats, President Karimov seems to have contradicted his own foreign policy rationale. Uzbekistan gets ever cozier and closer with Russia, but however much they may share goals in the short term, this will lead to less space for autonomous decisions for both Tashkent and Moscow. Mutual entrapment can be the unintended consequence of the current alliance.

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A HOT POLITICAL AUTUMN IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Talaibek Koichumanov and Zainidin Kurmanov

On September 21, 2006, the Jogorku Kenesh, Kyrgyzstan's Parliament, put forward a number of serious accusations against President Kurmanbek Bakiev, government, law enforcement bodies, special services and other officials, responsible, in the view of deputies, for the provocation organized against the leader of democratic opposition, the Jogorku Kenesh's former speaker Omurbek Tekebaev, who was detained in Warsaw airport charged with drug trafficking.

BACKGROUND: Following the sudden and unexpected change of power in Kyrgyzstan on March 24, 2005, a split occurred in the victorious camp on the country's further development. One of the points of discord has been the question of urgent constitutional reforms, which were advocated by democratic civil society groups, as well as representatives of Parliament and political parties. Such a reform would review the Constitution in order to strengthen checks and balances between the branches of power. The absence of such balances in the Constitution, in the view of the opposition, led to the restoration of an authoritarian regime, and what is often termed 'family' management of the country.

In its response to civil society's initiative, the Jogorku Kenesh called for a constitutional meeting that according to the Venice Commission carried out serious work and developed an acceptable version of constitutional changes. After the election of the new president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, in July 2005, he came to head the Constitutional Council ex officio. Since then, the Council's work has remained unfinished. The opposition alleges that the President has been delaying and disrupting the work of the Constitutional Council due to a lack of will to follow through with constitutional reforms. In autumn 2005, the President published a version of his own of possible constitutional amendments. This was considered to include only cosmetic amendments to Akayev's Constitution, thus

increasing the opposition's suspicions. Later on, under pressure from the opposition, he disavowed this version and in January 2006 had to issue a decree on preparation of a referendum on constitutional changes, and its conduct before the end of 2006. Nevertheless, opposition politicians do not believe in the sincerity of his intentions to follow this matter through.

The vague position of the country's new leadership in terms of constitutional reform aroused concerns in democratic circles from the very beginning, resulting in the unification this year of a number of political parties and civil society organizations into the People's Coalition of Democratic Powers, later renamed the movement "For Reforms". Omurbek Tekebaev, the Jogorku Kenesh's ex-speaker and chairman of the "Ata Meken" party, became its co-chairman. In April and June 2006, this opposition bloc conducted two mass meetings in Bishkek's central square with demands for political reforms. In case these demands are not fulfilled, the opposition threatens to organize large demonstration to demand the dismissal of the Bakiyev-Kulov tandem.

Tekebayev is well-known throughout the country, having been elected to Parliament four times. He ran for President twice, in 1995 and 2000. He came in second in 2000, as evident falsifications in favor of Akayev marred the vote, officially gathering about 15 percent. After the events of March 24, he

was elected Speaker of Parliament and carried out a policy independent from the President. His harsh statements addressed to the President led to renewed political crisis, and his resignation from the Speaker's post. The President attempted to have him unseated by the use of significant "administrative resources", yet the President's followers failed to collect the required number of votes. After two unsuccessful attempts to dismiss him, Tekebaev resigned voluntarily to avoid the premature dissolution of the parliament. At the moment, he is not hiding his political ambitions and declares that he will run for president in order "to return power to the people and parliament".

IMPLICATIONS: On

September 5, 2006, during a business trip to an Economic Forum in Poland, Tekebaev was arrested in Warsaw airport accused of drug trafficking, following information received from the Kazakh Interpol center. The Astana Interpol center had posted information that a group of alleged activists of the banned Hizb-ut-Tahrir

movement traveled from Istanbul to Warsaw with narcotics, and could have Kyrgyz, Uzbek or Kazakh passports. Among those named was Omurbek Tekebaev. It was also mentioned that he was a Member and former speaker of the Parliament, something that later shocked Polish authorities.

On September 8, the Warsaw district court, having examined the "Tekebaev case", passed a verdict of "not guilty" and presented its apologies to the Kyrgyz politician. Meanwhile in Kyrgyzstan, a special Parliamentary commission was established, headed by Vice-Speaker Tairbek Sarpashev, which presented convincing evidence (including video materials) that a special operation was carried out

against Tekebaev in Bishkek's Manas airport as a result of which a *matryoshka* doll with heroin was discovered in the politician's luggage. Early in the investigation, two officials voluntarily resigned: the Chairman of the National Security Service, Busurmankul Tabaldiev and his first deputy, Janysh Bakiyev, the President's brother.

During the investigation, deputies started demanding the resignation of both the President and Government. President Bakiyev had to come personally to the Parliament, where he provided explanations and promised to investigate objectively the incident, and to punish everyone guilty irrespective of their posts. Nevertheless, a group of

opposition deputies ensured a resolution was adopted that assessed the events harshly and demanded serious punishment of the guilty. The parliamentary investigation continued, and on September 21 adopted a resolution, from which radical demands were produced, such as the resignation of the President and Government.

What lay behind the *matryoshka* incident, and who is taking advantage of this fuel added to the



Omurbek Tekebaev

already burning fire that is the political situation in Kyrgyzstan? First, there are obviously forces that strive for pushing, by any means, the scale of political stability off balance for their own benefit. One example is the militant wing of the ruling administration. These could also be the so-called political flunkies who are trying to please the higher echelons at their own risk. These could also be deeply conspiratorial operations of the special services, but it is highly unlikely that the head of the main special service agency would be unaware of the planned operation.

Secondly, it is possible that a so-called "third force" is involved, something often referred to by

politicians from all sides. As it turns out, the destabilization of Kyrgyzstan is profitable for many people – apologists of the former regime, “imperialists”, religious fundamentalists, and many others.

CONCLUSIONS: The *matryoshka* scandal showed four things. Firstly, this type of simple provocation did not work in Kyrgyz society. Secondly, those who initiated the action were either unaware of or reckless about the volatility of the Kyrgyz situation and the growing risk of another social explosion. Thirdly, the authorities demonstrated their continuing inability to control the socio-political situation in the country to the extent of avoiding or preventing such provocations. Fourth, it is obvious that the opposition has become a hostage to its own initiatives, implying that retreating would mean a political fiasco. It is most likely that this argument has become key for the opposition, which publicly

declared that on November 2 it intends to carry out the next, third national demonstration in Bishkek to demand the resignation of the President and Prime minister. In case this action is successful, the first step, according to the opposition, will be the creation of a coalition government with the participation of all political forces, the introduction of radical changes to the Constitution, and the transition to a parliamentary form of government.

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THE CHINA AND EURASIA FORUM QUARTERLY

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program

Volume 4, No. 3

August 2006

 Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program



New issue of the

China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly

The August 2006 issue of the China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, edited by Dr. Niklas Swanström, is online.

The issue contains articles by Alan Rousso, Gulshan Sachdeva, Bates Gill, Ariel Cohen, Kathleen Hancock, and others.

The issue is freely available online through www.silkroadstudies.org or www.cacianalyst.org

FIELD REPORTS

“I LIKE! YOU LIKE?”: BRITISH COMEDIAN CHEERS, DISGUSTS KAZAKHSTANIS

Erica Marat

Sacha Baron Cohen's character, Borat, playing a journalist from Kazakhstan, has turned into a theme for intensive discussions both in Kazakhstan and internationally. Some find Borat's character to be a virtuoso of spontaneous acting, while others think he is a deep insult against Kazakhstan and is an epitome of political incorrectness. Meanwhile, Baron Cohen himself, a British comedian, seems to be gaining enormous popularity thanks to this clamor.

In his acting, Borat jokes with most embarrassing and controversial issues, including illiteracy in etiquette, anti-Semitism, racism, alcoholism, incest, homosexuality, prostitution and Kazakhstan's relations with Uzbekistan.

Most people in Kazakhstan appear rather disgusted with Borat's jokes. As one World Bank representative comments, "Kazakhstan is a Muslim country, there should be boundaries especially towards women. An assault against a native woman is an assault against the entire nation."

Compared to its neighbors, Kazakhstan stands out with its economic potential and relative political openness. But Baron Cohen's picking on Kazakhstan turned into a source for other Central Asian states to mock the country. Borat is actively discussed on Central Asian internet forums, mostly in an offensive tone against Kazakhs.

During Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev's visit to the U.S. on September 26-29, Baron Cohen used the opportunity to promote his new movie on Borat's adventures. Playing Borat, he appeared in

front of the Kazakh embassy in Washington, D.C., only an hour after Nazarbayev's visit. Borat was entirely ignored by the embassy's officials, but attracted a wide range of journalists and reporters.

Borat also showed up in front of the White House on September 29, inviting U.S. President George W. Bush to take part in his movies. Borat's image appeared in numerous U.S. news and entertainment outlets, such as CNN, USA Today, GQ, Entertainment Weekly, etc., arguably more often than news about Nazarbayev's actual visit.

Kazakhstan's repugnance to Baron Cohen's comedies is understandable. Similar to other Soviet successor states, Kazakhstan is struggling to build its own image as an independent and sovereign state with a legitimate government.

Nazarbayev's daughter and media magnate, Dariga Nazarbayeva, was among the first public figures to call for accepting Borat's character with a sense of humor. However, the Kazakh public's disgust seems to outweigh this, and Borat's official website on a Kazakhstani domain was blocked by local officials. Meanwhile, several other websites and forums expressing hatred against the comedian were created.

Kazakh students studying abroad more than anyone else express concern with Baron Cohen's new movie, to be presented this November. Many call him a "pseudo-Kazakh", whose indentations include to degrade the image of oil-rich Kazakhstan in the West. One Kazakh student complains that "Today, Borat is the most known 'Kazakh', who hijacks

Kazakhstan's efforts to enhance its international reputation."

Previously, Kazakh top government officials and diplomats have expressed their concern with Sasha Cohen's comedies, yet this had little impact on Borat's international popularity. As one news source put it, "They [the Kazakh Government] are damned if they do [respond] and damned if they don't."

One scholar suggested that the only way for Kazakh officials to react to Borat is to embrace his image. After all, "Borat is not against all Kazaks, but is reflective of any post-Soviet person's adventures in the West... Kazakhstan was unlucky to be chosen among all". Indeed, Baron Cohen constructed Borat's image after meeting a real person in southern Russia in 1995.

Those who enjoy Borat's jokes do not necessarily think Kazakhstan's international image is at risk. As one American graduate student thinks, in fact Borat shames his respondents, mostly Westerners, who have little knowledge about other parts of the world and are easily fooled by the comedian.

Baron Cohen's other two popular characters, an urban English appropriating rap culture, Aly G, and Austrian homosexual Bruno, follow a somewhat similar logic of acting methods. All three characters provoke their respondents by pushing the limits of irrelevance, while also sporadically bringing in somewhat meaningful issues.

Weeks before Nazarbayev's visit to the U.S. and Baron Cohen's release of a new movie about Borat, the Kazakh government launched an international PR campaign to enhance Kazakhstan's image. The campaign was channeled through *CNN* and *The New York Times*, appraising democratic developments, economic potential, and cultural issues.

In spite of Kazakhstan's nervousness about Baron Cohen's creativity, Nazarbayev's recent visit to the U.S. was undeniably successful, while Kazakhstan's energy resources still represent the Central Asian region's hope for future economic development.

FRANCE LOOSES CREDIBILITY IN AZERBAIJAN

Fariz Ismailzade

The decision by the French Parliament last week to pass the bill which requires the punishment of the persons who deny so called "Armenian genocide" has sparked protests in Baku and the rest of the Turkic world. Numerous pickets have taken place in front of the French embassy in Baku for several days in a row. These were organized by both political parties and civic groups.

The protests were started by the United Azerbaijan Popular Front party, whose members were shouting such slogans as "Shame on the patrons of the aggressor Armenia!" Local police forces broke up the picket and arrested one of the activists of the party. The protests were followed up by the

Karabakh Liberation Organization, notorious for its anti-peace stance and more radical attitude towards Armenia than the government's. Besides shouting anti-French slogans, the picketers managed to divert the police's attention and throw eggs at the embassy building. As a result, six KLO activists were arrested. Nevertheless, the protestors delivered their declaration to the employees of the embassy, in which they called for a break of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and France and France's expulsion from the OSCE Minsk group.

On the same day, the Karabakh Veterans Organization issued a statement, in which it echoed the demands of the KLO. The war veterans

expressed their deep regret over France's support to the historic injustice, and tied the decision of the French parliament with that country's desire to prevent Turkey's EU membership. "No one can guarantee that in the future similar acts will not be undertaken against Azerbaijan," read the statement.

Opposition parties were similarly radical in their tone. Sardar Jalaloglu, the deputy chairman of the Democratic Party and one of the co-founders of the Azadliq (Freedom) political bloc said "France must answer for all the crimes it has committed since the time of Napoleon." Umid (Hope) party chairman Iqbal Agazadeh also demanded the expulsion of France from the negotiation process on the Karabakh conflict. The Musavat and Popular Front parties also joined the storm of criticism of France. "The decision of the French parliament carries an anti-Muslim and anti-Turkic nature and was passed under the influence of the Armenian lobby," said a press release from the Musavat party.

Indeed, the decision of the French Parliament put French diplomats in a difficult position. Being one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk group, responsible for the peace talks, France must behave in an impartial and neutral manner. Yet, French lawmakers, under the influence of the powerful Armenian Diaspora in that country, put their own Foreign Ministry in an awkward situation. The French Ambassador in Baku held a press conference a day earlier and expressed his hopes that the bill would not pass. Yet, few in Azerbaijan today doubt

that France has a biased attitude. The long-time suspicions of Azerbaijanis that France is not a neutral player in the conflict, found their worst realization this week.

Meanwhile, Azerbaijani authorities also harshly criticized the decision, yet stopped short of calling for the expulsion of France from the peace process. Azerbaijani lawmakers have sent a note of protest to their French counterparts, yet a spokesman for the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tahir Tagizadeh, told journalists in Baku, "I don't understand the rationale of those who call for the expulsion of France out of the Minsk group."

No doubt, recent developments will negatively affect the peace talks on the Karabakh conflict. While in Baku several weeks ago, the French co-chair of the Minsk group angered the Azerbaijani public and media representatives by calling the capital of Karabakh by its Armenian name "Stepanakert", whereas the official Azerbaijani name of the city is Khankendi.

As the year 2006, widely regarded as a "window of opportunity" for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, is coming to an end with no major breakthrough achieved, pessimists in the Azerbaijani capital are more loudly calling for a military solution to the conflict. In this situation, the loss of credibility of the international mediators because of the decision of the French Parliament will negatively influence the ability of foreign diplomats to tone down this rhetoric.

RUSSIAN EMBARGO BEGINS TO BE FELT IN GEORGIA

Kakha Jibladze

With tensions between Georgia and Russia at a record high, Moscow has implemented a transportation and postal embargo on Georgia as well as started an aggressive deportation program against Georgian citizens living in Russia. While Georgian authorities are working hard to use the embargo as an example of the Kremlin's radical

policies and general instability, the embargo is already having an effect on the Georgian market.

According to the Kremlin, the embargo was enforced due to Georgia's decision to arrest and deport four Russian military officers accused of spying. However, in Georgia and internationally,

analysts believe the embargo was one of many measures Moscow has devised to 'punish' Tbilisi for pursuing Intensified Dialogue with NATO and promoting, in the eyes of the Kremlin, an anti-Russian rhetoric.

The embargo is really made up of three parts: transportation, postal, and social. The transportation embargo became effective on October 2, and is already causing problems for both Russian and Georgian businesses that depend on Russian goods. According to Georgian news media reports, everyone from booksellers to tour companies in Georgia are already complaining about record low sales as goods, people and services are stopped at the border. Russian companies like Aeroflot are also reportedly suffering.

In the market place, prices for Russian products have increased noticeably as commerce is transported through Kiev or other third party ports. Chocolate, flour and other staples of the Russian market are all significantly more expensive than they were a mere two weeks ago. While the short term effect is hard on the pocket book, in the long term government officials believe this embargo – and shortage of traditional Russian goods – will help strengthen Georgian industry. For example, some analysts believe as much as 70 percent of flour consumed in Georgia was imported from Russia. However, Georgia itself is home to several types of different wheat plants, as well as flour manufactures. In addition, with Russian products no longer available at competitive prices, goods from other countries will have a better chance of entering the market.

The postal embargo is also affecting businesses, primarily DHL and Fed Ex in Georgia. According to reports, the last packages sent to Moscow from the DHL office in Tbilisi included a bundle of grapes Georgian Defense Minister (and Wine Czar) Irakli Okruashvili sent to officials in Moscow. No one at the defense ministry would comment on the packages.

Although the Russian Duma, the lower house of the legislation, threatened to ban money transfers from

Russia to Georgia, officially that has not occurred yet. According to reports, wire transfers are still arriving in Tbilisi and some banks are offering clients alternative routes through third countries. However the embargo – and subsequent anti-Georgian policy – has already affect the ability of Georgians to send money home from Russia.

Both Georgians holding Georgian citizenship and naturalized Russian citizens who were born in Georgia are being deported and harassed in Moscow and other cities throughout Russia. On Friday, October 6 the first plane load of deported Georgians landed in Tbilisi. According to news reports, some had proper permits and visas while others did not. Regardless, already three planes have arrived with Georgians deported from Moscow. According to the Georgian government, those who return to Georgia will receive government assistance finding jobs. However, since the pay scale – not to mention the employment market – is much smaller in Tbilisi, it is likely that these people, and the family members that they used to support, will suffer financially at least in the short term.

In addition, Russian government authorities have begun aggressively shutting down Georgian-owned businesses and investigating Georgian entrepreneurs, artists, etc living in Russia, including such luminaries as the famous sculptor Zurab Tsereteli and Boris Akunin (born Giorgi Chkhartishvili). While it is impossible to say how much – if any – financial support these luminaries were providing for family back in Georgia, the Georgian National Bank reported that \$219 million was transferred to Georgian families over the past eight months. While that figure is considerably lower than the \$1 billion members of the Duma claim is transferred to Georgia annually, it does represent the income of many hundreds of families in Georgia and they could be adversely affected if/when their relative is deported from Russia.

In addition, the Russian immigration department declared on Thursday, October 5 that no more work permits or student visas would be issued for Georgian citizens.

The Russian embargo will harm the Georgian market in the short term because Georgia has been largely dependent on Russian goods in the past. In addition, the loss of income from relatives working in Russia will be a heavy social blow for Georgia.

However, if the government continues to limit the negative rhetoric and concentrate on constructive policy and diplomacy, in the long run this embargo could be a great harbinger for a stronger, more independent Georgian market.

WHAT WILL NOVEMBER 2 BRING IN KYRGYZSTAN?

Nurshat Ababakirov

Fueled by the reluctance of the President to carry out continuing demands, the opposition-minded Movement for Reforms plans to mount another rally on November 2. It is expected to be as large as the other two rallies that took place in late April and May of this year. The rally will call for the resignation of the political tandem between the president and prime minister.

The Council of the Movement for Reforms bases its claims on several arguments. First, it argues that the government ignored the will of the people of Kyrgyzstan by disregarding demands set at the meetings on 29 April and 27 May, the demands of Kurultai (people's assembly) in Aksy on 17 September, and the resolution of Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) dated 22 September. Second, it contends that "family rule" and political persecutions still prevail. The heads of the intelligence services are said to be personally involved in the organization of political provocations.

Third, leading economic branches (power production, gas industry, Manas airport, railways, gold mining, and the custom service) are said to have been turned into "family businesses". The prices for cement, roofing slates, and basic food staples is rising. Fourth, the opposition claims that the properties of Akaev's family have passed to Bakiyev's family. People still do not know the truth about the machinations that brought Kyrgyzstan to

a humiliating debt trap. Fifth, the constitutional reform process has been suspended. Mass media is under pressure, whereas the KTR state channel has allegedly become a "family channel". Sixth, according to the movement, the country is being openly visited by people who are on the international wanted list, leaving an indelible mark on the reputation of Kyrgyzstan. Finally, the opposition argues that according to the present Constitution, President Bakiyev is responsible for the current crisis situation by deliberately failing to carry out the constitutional and other reforms. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Felix Kulov bears moral responsibility for his conforming position.

On 12 September, the Civic Forum on the political situation, initiated by non-governmental organizations and the Movement for Reforms, took place. Nevertheless, the aim of the forum, a dialogue with the government to find a compromise before the rally, was not met. Among the invited top officials – the president, the speaker of parliament, and the prime minister, only the latter visited the forum. However, the apparent lack of a willingness to make concessions reinforced their plans to hold a street rally. The organizers expect about 15,000 people to participate.

Prime Minister Felix Kulov, who came to forum accompanied with his entourage, was counted upon to define his position, which in the eyes of many observers could determine the outcome of the

process. Even though he encountered ample criticism, he continued to remain neutral, which could be detrimental to his political posture in the long run. Local experts point out that his firm position over the confrontation between the president and burgeoning opposition keeps the situation from spinning out of control.

“It is not about forced resignation. We want them to resign voluntarily”, says the member of the Movement for Reforms, member and former speaker of parliament Omurbek Tekebaev. It is not an “unconditional” demand for resignation, but a “means” to remind the government about their promises and to show our “decisiveness”, says Tekebaev. “The government still has time to embark on reforms and we want real action”.

The main aim of the Movement for Reforms is to change the system so that the state does not depend on one person. “We do not want to fill the current president’s seat”, says the leader of the Social-Democrat party, Almazbek Atambaev, a former Minister of Tourism and Industry. Early this month, Tekebaev assured that a constitutional vacuum would not follow if the government was to change: if the president, resigns the prime minister’s government will keep working, as well as the parliament.

Another member of the Movement for Reforms, parliamentarian Temir Sariev, said that the number

of disappointed people within the close circle of president is growing, resulting in recent “frantic” reshuffling of the president’s administration. He believes that discontent is rooted in the way the president makes decisions, implying the salience of the “influences” of various individuals on decision-making. For some, this explains President Bakiyev’s absence in the forum.

How the rally will end remains to be seen, but the observers believe that the president should not underestimate the situation. Nonetheless, another “revolution” is not expected. “If ten thousand people make the government step down, then the next government will face the same situation,” said politician Ishak Masaliev. Given the easiness to gather people, Kyrgyzstan is at stake, he warned. In his view, the stumbling block between the opposition and the president is the type of government system to be adopted, something that has never been clarified. The general call for constitutional reform after the March 2005 events was meant to change the power balance between the three branches of government, but not the entire system. Accordingly, the opposition, advocating a parliamentary system and knowing President Bakiev’s unwillingness to comply, consciously leads to a standoff on constitutional reforms and disunity in order to eventually blame the president.



NEWS DIGEST

U.S. RIGHTS GROUP HAILS EU MOVE ON TURKMENISTAN

5 October

U.S.-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Thursday the European Union's decision to abandon a trade pact with the reclusive Central Asian state of Turkmenistan was a "landmark move against tyranny." Global rights groups have long criticized the European Union for negotiating a trade pact with gas-producing Turkmenistan, run by an autocratic leader with a personality cult. The deal has been on hold since the 1990s due to human rights concerns. The International Trade Committee of the European Parliament voted earlier this week against pursuing the pact any further pending "clear tangible and sustained progress on the human rights situation." "(The) vote signals that the EU will not allow grossly abusive governments to profit from EU engagement," said Holly Cartner, HRW's Europe and Central Asia director, in a statement. "This decision gives some teeth to EU statements about conditions for engagement with Central Asia. Now it's up to the Turkmen government to meet its international human rights obligations and stop isolating itself." Officials in Turkmenistan could not be reached for comment. Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov -- officially titled Turkmenbashi, or Head of the Turkmen -- tolerates no dissent. Most opposition activists and journalists have been driven into exile or jailed. In the latest incident, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty said last month that its correspondent in Turkmenistan had died in jail after she was imprisoned for illegally possessing weapons. The EU parliament resolution said conditions for pursuing any trade agreement included releasing political prisoners and allowing independent political parties. It also called for the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations and independent human rights groups to be allowed to operate freely in the country. (Reuters)

SAAKASHVILI REPORTS HIS NATIONAL MOVEMENT'S LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN LOCAL POLLS

5 October

Georgia's ruling National Movement won a landslide victory in Thursday's municipal elections, President Mikheil Saakashvili told his fellow party members on Thursday evening. "Exit polls show that we received an overwhelming majority of votes, at least 70%," he said, adding that the elections were "clean". The preliminary results will be announced within hours. (Interfax)

RAMZAN KADYROV DOES NOT HAVE PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS YET

5 October

On October 5, Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov celebrates his 30th birthday. According to the Chechen constitution, he may become president since this day. However, Mr. Kadyrov stated on his birthday that he did not have presidential ambitions yet. "I have already decided; it is too early for me to become the president. Moreover, I may not do it, if even I want it. We have the elected republican president; I believe, it is too early to speak about me as a candidate until his presidential term is over," Mr. Kadyrov is quoted by BBC as stating. (Regnum)

GEORGIAN MINERAL WATER, WINE WILL RETURN TO RUSSIAN MARKET AFTER PROOF OF QUALITY - ONISHCHENKO

6 October

Georgia's mineral water may be allowed to return to the Russian market only after there is proof of its quality and safety, Federal Consumer Rights Oversight Service head Gennady Onishchenko told Interfax on Friday.

"The principle is the same: you can return after you prove quality is there," said Onishchenko, who doubles as Russia's chief epidemiologist. The Georgian authorities have not yet come up with any initiatives and proposals on how they intend to improve the quality of their mineral water, he said. "The sole requirement is quality and safety. Nobody is working on it at the moment. Nobody has come up with any initiatives regarding the matter either officially or unofficially," he said. Onishchenko said his service would see to it that the banned Georgian mineral water is not sold on the Russian market. "Naturally,

we will continue our monitoring. As far as I know, no instances of this product being sold in Russia have been reported recently. No deliveries of this water have been made," the official said, adding that earlier shipments had been sent back or destroyed. There are no grounds today to allow the sale of Georgian wine in Russia, Onishchenko said in an earlier interview. "It is not a matter of likes and dislikes. There is no quality. The Georgian authorities have no desire or will. On the contrary, they are probably aware of the fact that they are incapable of ensuring the quality of wine products," he said. In late March, Onishchenko's service banned the sale in Russia of alcohol-containing products produced in Georgia and Moldova, saying they did not meet Russia's quality and safety requirements. The export of Georgia's mineral water was banned at the beginning of May. (Interfax)

KYRGYZSTAN TO RECEIVE \$15 FOR STRUGGLE AGAINST POVERTY

6 October

International Development Association (IDA) will grant \$15mln to finance the Second Rural Investment and Services Project for Kyrgyzstan on October 3. The grant agreement was signed in Washington, REGNUM correspondent was informed at the Kyrgyzstani foreign ministry press office. The project is aimed at combating poverty in Kyrgyzstan's rural areas. Signing the agreement, IDA acting director on Kyrgyzstan Annette Dixon commented that the project is unique in the region, and its realization may become a good example for other Central Asian states. (Regnum)

ARMENIAN CANDIDATE ELECTED AT MIXED ARMENIAN-GEORGIAN VOTING STATION IN AKHALTSIKHI REGION

6 October

Armenian Aram Vardanyan was elected in the municipal elections at the Tsukhrut village of Akhaltsikhi region of Georgia where Georgian Naira Samsonidze was alternative candidate. Vardanyan received 650 votes, whereas Samsonidze – about 120, A-Info agency reports. According to a source, the victory of the Armenian candidate is especially meaningful, since the Georgian candidate was supported not only by Georgian voters but also by representative of the ruling Georgian party United National Movement Aram Pogosov, who reportedly used his connections. Pogosov was earlier adviser to Saakashvili's personal envoy to Samtskhe-Javakheti. (Regnum)

HEAD OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION KILLED IN CHECHNYA

8 October

The head of the administration of the village of Enikali in Chechnya's Kurchaloi district has been assassinated, a local law enforcement source told Interfax Sunday. Unidentified attackers also fired upon the building housing the local elections commission. Six communities in the Kurchaloi district and a number of others in the Nozhai-Yurt district are holding early elections of deputies to the Chechen People's Assembly on Sunday. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN CITIZENS PREPARED TO LEAVE TBILISI BY CARGO AIRCRAFT

9 October

Russian citizens who were due to leave Tbilisi for Moscow by Russian Emergency Situations Ministry aircraft are not leaving Tbilisi airport despite the cancellation of the flights. Some Russians said that they are ready to fly to Moscow by cargo aircraft, because they their Georgian visas had expired and they were without money. Earlier on Monday, the Georgian department of civil aviation received a request on the landing of two Russian Emergency Situations Ministry's planes: a passenger plane and a cargo aircraft, the department told Interfax. However, no response was given when Georgia requested an explanation of this presence of the cargo plane. "We insist that Russia does not transfer people from Moscow or Tbilisi by cargo plane," head of the department Giorgi Mandzhgaladze said. The day before Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said that he would prevent the deportation of Georgians by cargo aircraft. (Interfax)

KAZAKH MINISTRY SAYS HIV OUTBREAK CONTAINED

10 October

Kazakh Health Minister Anatoly Dernovoi told a cabinet meeting on October 10 that an HIV outbreak in South Kazakhstan province has been contained. Dernovoi said that an investigation revealed 76 HIV-positive children and six child deaths after 9,070 children, 174 blood donors, 3,143 medical workers, and 18,861 women were examined. Twelve criminal cases have been opened in connection with the outbreak. The children are believed to have been infected through blood transfusions. Dernovoi noted that there were 6,943 officially registered HIV-positive individuals in Kazakhstan as of October 1. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

UZBEKISTAN CONFIRMS GAS PRICE HIKE FOR KYRGYZSTAN

11 October

Kyrgyz national gas company Kyrgyzgaz has received official confirmation from Uzbek oil and gas company

Uzbekneftegaz that Uzbekistan intends to raise the price of the natural gas it sells Kyrgyzstan from \$55 to \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters starting January 1, akipress.org reported on October 11. A spokesperson for Kyrgyzgaz told the news agency that a definite price agreement would only emerge after talks scheduled for next week. The spokesperson noted, "Kyrgyzgaz has a chance to receive fuel at an advantageous price." Uzbekistan recently indicated that it intends to impose a similar price increase on Tajikistan (akipress.org)

UNIT SET UP TO TREAT HIV-POSITIVE CHILDREN IN SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN

11 October

The required medical and social assistance will be given to HIV-positive children and their parents in the South Kazakhstan region, Kazakh Public Health Ministry Anatoly Dernovoi said. "The city hospital in Shymkent opened a 30-patient unit for the treatment of HIV-positive children. The supply of necessary drugs, including antiretroviral compounds, has been created. There are no problems with drug supplies," the minister said at a press conference in Astana on Wednesday. An additional 101 million tenge (127.67/\$1) will be allocated from the Kazakh budget to the region to help counter the spread of HIV, he said. UNICEF representative in Kazakhstan Alexander Zuyev, who participated in the press conference, said that HIV-positive children in the South Kazakhstan region have "good chances to live." "We are certain, and this is the opinion of international experts, that the majority of these children have good chances to live, should they be treated according to advanced international methods with the use of the most modern drugs," he said. According the latest official data, 76 children and eight mothers contracted the HIV infection because medical staff recklessly disregarded their duties. Another six children have already died. (Interfax)

SOUTH OSSETIAN LEADER CALLS FOR CONDEMNATION OF GEORGIAN 'GENOCIDE'

12 October

Addressing a session of the parliament of the Republic of North Ossetia on October 12, Eduard Kokoity, president of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia argued that the hostilities between his republic and the central Georgian government were not an inter-ethnic conflict but an act of genocide by Georgians against Ossetians, and should be condemned as such, regnum.ru reported. Kokoity further criticized the OSCE for allegedly "fully" supporting Georgia against South Ossetia, and the international community of "double standards." The

North Ossetian parliamentarians decided to draft an appeal to the Russian State Duma to recognize the genocide of the Ossetian people. Also on October 12, a two-day meeting opened in the North Ossetian capital, Vladikavkaz, of the Joint Control Commission tasked with monitoring the situation in the South Ossetian conflict zone, regnum.ru reported. South Ossetian Deputy Prime Minister Boris Chochiyev told journalists prior to the opening of those talks that he hopes the Georgian delegation will agree to unspecified compromise solutions that will not be directed at destroying previous agreements. (regnum.ru)

AZERBAIJAN MULLS STOPPING RUSSIAN GAS IMPORTS IF PRICE TOO HIGH

12 October

Azerbaijan may stop imports of Russian natural gas in 2007 and seek alternatives if prices offered at upcoming talks are unacceptably high, the country's energy minister said Thursday. Since last year, Russian energy giant Gazprom has been pushing for 'market prices' on the gas it sells to its ex-Soviet neighbors, which had previously been sold gas at preferential rates - in some cases, several times lower than the European level. "If the price for natural gas is too high, Azerbaijan would refuse to buy it [from Russia]," Natic Aliyev said adding that the country has many alternative sources of gas supplies. Under an agreement signed in December 2003, Gazprom is to supply Azerbaijan with 4.5-5.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually until the end of 2008. In 2006, Azerbaijan will receive 4.5 billion cu m of gas at a price of \$110 per 1,000 cu m. The average price for EU countries is \$240 per 1,000 cu m. The next round of talks between Azerbaijan and Gazexport, the Russian gas monopoly's export arm, on setting the volume and price for Russian gas supplies to the Caspian country in 2007 is scheduled for November. Aliyev said hydrocarbon-rich Azerbaijan could import gas from Iran and also increase domestic production significantly once its Shakh-Deniz field in the Caspian Sea, with estimated reserves of around 1,000 billion cu m, comes on stream in December. Azerbaijan's annual domestic gas consumption totals 15-16 billion cu m. The country currently produces around 6.5 billion cu m of natural gas per year. Iran has proven natural gas reserves of around 28 trillion cubic meters, the world's second largest reserves behind Russia. In 2005, gas production in the country totaled 86.6 bln cu m. (RIA Novosti)

FOOD AID DWINDLING IN CHECHNYA, AZERBAIJAN: U.N. ENVOY

12 October

Food aid in Russia's Chechnya and in neighboring Azerbaijan is dwindling because of funding shortages and could run out within weeks, a United Nations envoy said on Thursday. Jean Ziegler, the U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food, said international assistance for displaced persons in Russia's violence stricken Chechen province has been cut back to only wheat flour and could be cut entirely by the end of this month. The rations normally include oil, sugar and salt. The World Food Programme said in July it may need to pull out of Chechnya because of a funds shortfall. The U.N. food agency feeds 250,000 people in the region, where tens of thousands live as refugees, are crammed into ramshackle hostels or are jobless. "There is a risk that food aid programs could be stopped by the end of October," Ziegler said in a statement released in Geneva. While Russia says its war in Chechnya is over, unemployment is rife and attempts to rebuild the economy have been hampered by rebel attacks on police and Russian soldiers. In Azerbaijan, where hundreds of thousands have been made homeless because of a territorial dispute with Armenia, Ziegler said existing food aid stocks would only last until the end of the month. Ziegler asked donor countries to "immediately honor their legal obligations and ensure the realization of the right to food of displaced persons in the Chechen Republic and in Azerbaijan." (Reuters)

UZBEKISTAN TO ALMOST DOUBLE GAS EXPORT PRICE

12 October

Uzbekistan warned Russia and its Central Asian neighbours on Thursday it would almost double its gas export price at the start of next year. Uzbek state pipeline company Uztransgas published a statement in an Uzbek newspaper saying it would charge \$100 per 1,000 cubic metres from Jan.1, 2007, up from a current \$55-60. "Uztransgas has officially informed its trading partners about the higher price for Uzbek gas," the company said. Russia is the main buyer of Uzbek gas, importing up to 9 billion cubic metres a year. The move comes just weeks after another big Central Asian gas producer, Turkmenistan, raised its export price after threatening to halt supplies to Russia. A higher Uzbek gas price is also likely to hit smaller and poorer neighbours Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, who largely rely on Uzbekistan for their energy needs. (Reuters)

GEORGIAN TEACHERS CONDEMN RUSSIA'S "PERSECUTION" OF GEORGIANS

12 October

Several dozen members of the Georgian trade union of teachers demonstrated outside the Russian embassy in

Tbilisi on Thursday demanding an end to what they called the persecution of Georgians by authorities in Russia. "We protest against the open persecution of Georgians by the Russian authorities. Georgians in Russia have found themselves in the situation Jews were in in Nazi Germany in the 30s," one of the organizers, Manana Burchumelidze, told reporters. There were no reported excesses during the demonstration. Nearly all Russian embassy staff left for Moscow several days ago. (Interfax)

HYUNDAI PURSUING PLANT IN UZBEKISTAN

13 October

Hyundai Motor Co., the world's sixth-largest automaker, said Friday it is in talks with the Uzbekistan government to buy state-owned UZ-Daewoo Motors, formerly owned by South Korea's now-defunct Daewoo Group. "Nothing has been decided," said a Hyundai Motor spokesman, Jake Jang. "The talks between the two parties are under way." Hyundai, which is pursuing an aggressive global expansion, already has factories in China, India, Turkey, the United States and plans one in the Czech Republic. Jang said the Uzbekistan plant, which began operating in 1996 in the eastern part of the country, has production capacity of 200,000 vehicles a year. It currently assembles cars based on kits supplied by GM Daewoo Auto & Technology Co., the South Korean unit of General Motors Corp.

Detroit-based GM created GM Daewoo in 2002 after acquiring a majority stake in defunct Daewoo Motor Co., which was declared bankrupt in 2000 after years of reckless expansion on borrowed money. Moon Kum-ji, a spokeswoman for GM Daewoo, said the company supplies the assembly kits to the Uzbekistan plant, but sold its interest in the venture when General Motors acquired Daewoo Motor. Hyundai wants to use the factory to help it further penetrate markets in Russia and other former Soviet republics, Jang said. (AP)

AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA, TURKEY AGREE ON MAJOR RAILWAY PROJECT

14 October

Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey have reached an agreement on key issues concerning the railway route from Kars (Turkey) to Baku via Akhalkalaki (Georgia) and Tbilisi (Georgia). "In the course of trilateral talks held in Baku yesterday, the drafts of three important documents were considered: a framework agreement on the project, the Georgian side's obligations to allot land for the construction of the railway road, and a credit agreement between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, and on the whole an

understanding was reached," Azerbaijani Transport Minister Ziya Mamedov told journalists on Saturday. The three countries will finalise the document within a month and resubmit them. "The main corrections will have to be made in the credit agreement," the minister said, adding, "Each party has its own project financing proposals." According to Mamedov, Turkey has no objections and is ready to start implementing the project on its territory at the beginning of 2007. "We are now working with the Georgian side to make sure it can start building the railway road on its territory in the same period of time," Mamedov said. He believes Georgia has an interest in this two-year project. The new railway route is estimated at 422 million U.S. dollars. It envisages the construction of a 105-kilometre road, including 29 kilometres in Georgia and 76 kilometres in Turkey, as well as the modernisation of a 150-kilometre section of the Georgian railway road.

In the initial stage, the road will transport up to five million tonnes of cargos a year. But Mamedov says the new road will be of interest also to Kazakhstan and China, which are seeking to deliver their cargos to Europe by the shortest route. (Itar-Tass)

TWO CANADIAN SOLDIERS KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

15 October

Two Canadian soldiers have been killed in southern Afghanistan, while a governor escaped an assassination attempt and officials reported 12 more deaths in Taliban-linked violence. The soldiers, part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), were killed on Saturday in the flashpoint province of Kandahar when their unit was ambushed, the Canadian defence ministry announced. Officials in Afghanistan said three other troops had been wounded when they were attacked by rocket propelled grenades and small arms. Canadian authorities said two of its own were in stable condition with non-critical injuries. "Other Canadian units quickly responded to the attack and became involved in a three-hour battle with insurgents" with support from ISAF helicopters, it said. The incident brought to 42 the number of Canadian soldiers killed in the war-ravaged country, 34 of them this year. About 2,300 Canadian soldiers are based in Kandahar. More than 115 foreign soldiers have been killed in hostile action this year, which has been the worst for Taliban attacks since the movement was toppled from government in 2001. The governor of eastern Laghman province told AFP earlier Saturday he had survived an attack on his two-vehicle convoy as he was travelling to work. Laghman and other provinces close to the capital Kabul have been the scene of increasing incidents

related to the Taliban-led insurgency. Three senior district officials were killed in a similar attack in the province of Nangarhar earlier in the week. The governor of eastern Paktia province, Hakim Taniwal, was assassinated in a Taliban-claimed suicide bombing last month, becoming the first governor to be killed since the extremists were ousted from power. In another incident likely carried out by the Taliban or another Islamic group, police reported that a remote-controlled roadside bomb had killed six Afghan militiamen in Paktia on Friday. (AFP)

KYRGYZ CITIZEN KILLED IN MOSCOW

15 October

A Kyrgyz citizen found in the courtyard of a Moscow school on Saturday following an apparent beating, has died of his injuries, a source in Moscow law enforcement services told Interfax on Sunday. "The incident was reported by a Kyrgyz man who works as janitor at the Avrora business park. He complained that his son, 23, had been beaten up by unidentified assailants and that he found him lying in a school courtyard. He called an ambulance after bringing his son home, but the young man died before the ambulance arrived," the source said. The victim of the attack had injuries to the jaw and face, as well as multiple contusions. Police are trying to hunt down the assailants. Investigators have not ruled out ethnic enmity as a motive in the crime, the source said. (Interfax)

TROOPS DESTROY BOMB-MAKING CELL IN AFGHANISTAN, KILL THREE

16 October

Coalition war planes bombed and destroyed a bomb-making cell in central Afghanistan, in an encounter that left three insurgents dead and one foreign soldier wounded, the force said. Afghan and coalition troops had gone to the compound in the central province of Ghazni on intelligence that it housed a cell making "improvised explosive devices", bombs often used in the Taliban-led insurgency. "When the combined force attempted to peacefully search the compound and ask residents to come out for questioning, enemy personnel inside the compound began firing and wounded one coalition soldier," it said in a statement. "The combined force called in close-air support and killed three suspects in the engagement." The compound housed "improvised explosive device facilitators" and only men, it said on Monday. During the fighting, a weapons cache blew up and caused extensive damage. Doors inside the compound were later found to be booby-trapped with grenades and rocket-propelled grenade rounds. Racks of small arms and ammunition were discovered strewn around the

courtyard, the statement said. The troops called in a second air strike that "was directed to destroy the explosives in the remaining compound buildings." Ghazni is about 100 kilometres (60 miles) southwest of the capital Kabul, which saw a surge in bomb attacks a few weeks ago that included suicide bombings. This year has seen a spike in such attacks across the country. (AFP)

OSCE DELEGATION CONCLUDES FACT-FINDING MISSION TO ARMENIAN-AZERBAIJANI BORDER AREA

16 October

A team of international experts led by the OSCE concluded on October 12 a fact-finding mission along the Armenian-Azerbaijani border to investigate the causes of massive wildfires reported in Armenian-controlled territories of Azerbaijan in recent months, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The weeklong mission was conducted in accordance with a September 7 resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly that expressed "serious concern" over the reported fires but stopped short of supporting Azerbaijani allegations that the fires were deliberately started by the Armenians. The OSCE mission is due to submit its formal assessment to the UN General Assembly by April 2007. (RFE/RL)

UN SECURITY COUNCIL ADOPTS RESOLUTION CALLING ON GEORGIA TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT

16 October

During a meeting in New York, the UN Security Council adopted on October 13 a resolution extending the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) by another six months, until April 15, 2007, and calling on Georgia to exercise restraint in the wake of a crisis in relations with Russia. The Russian-sponsored resolution stated that the "new and tense" situation resulted in part from the July Georgian military operation in the upper Kodori Gorge and urged Tbilisi to ensure that no military forces not authorized by the 1994 cease-fire agreement be deployed to the area. The resolution also reiterated that Georgia "address seriously legitimate Abkhaz security concerns" and called on Georgian leaders to avoid militant rhetoric or provocative actions. It also urged the Abkhaz leadership to tackle "the need for a dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees" and to publicly reassure local residents, especially in the Gali district, that their rights of residency and identity will be respected. Following the vote, Security Council members also called on UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to explore how both sides can build confidence, improve security, and

reduce tension in the upper Kodori Gorge and in the districts of Gali and Zugdidi. (RFE/RL)

10 ACCORDS TO BE SIGNED DURING AZERBAIJAN LEADER'S VISIT TO BELARUS

17 October

Up to ten bilateral documents are expected to be signed during the official visit to Belarus by Azerbaijan's President Ilkham Aliyev, which begins on Tuesday, Novruz Mamedov, public relations chief with the administration of the Azerbaijani leader told Itar-Tass. "The key document, to be signed in Minsk by Presidents Ilkham Aliyev and Alexander Lukashenko, is the friendship and cooperation treaty between Azerbaijan and Belarus," Mamedov said.

"It's a framework document expected, to firm the legal groundwork of bilateral relations," he noted. The diplomats of the two countries are continuing to work on the draft agreements which will be finalized by the Azerbaijani-Belarusian top-level meeting. A high-placed official in the administration of the Azerbaijan president said these documents will regulate bilateral ties in the political, economic, and humanitarian spheres. Mamedov also noted that President Aliyev will hold talks with other Belarusian leaders in the course of his visit. It is the first trip by the head of the Azerbaijani state to Belarus since the two countries gained independence. Baku believes that it will give an impulse to the development of relations between the two countries, and contribute to the shaping of reliable legal and contractual groundwork of Azerbaijani-Belarusian cooperation. A Belarusian Foreign Ministry official told Itar-Tass that Ilkham Aliyev is planning to visit the Minsk car-making plant and the Minsk tractor maker, as well as the National Library. In the opinion of Belarusian experts, one of the main objectives of Ilkham Aliyev's visit to Minsk is the strengthening of top-level political contacts. The visit will also contribute to the stepping up of Belarusian-Azerbaijani trade and economic partnership and the development of bilateral ties in the humanitarian sphere. (Itar-Tass)

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT VOWS TO 'FIGHT' ARMENIAN DIASPORA

17 October

In a television interview with the Arabic-language network Al-Jazeera, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev threatened on October 17 to "fight" the politically active Armenian diaspora and announced a new state campaign to counter its influence and power. Aliyev explained that Azerbaijan plans to open new embassies and consulates as part of a new diplomatic effort aimed at confronting worldwide ethnic Armenian groups. He also added that a consulate was

established in the United States to confront the large ethnic Armenian population in California and "to fight the Armenian lobby."(AzerTag)

MILITANT AZERBAIJANI GROUP DEMONSTRATES AT FRENCH EMBASSY IN BAKU

17 October

A small group of demonstrators staged on October 16 a protest in front of the French Embassy in Baku, Turan reported. Organized by the Karabakh Liberation Organization to protest a recent vote by the French parliament to criminalize the denial of the "Armenian genocide," the demonstrators pelted the embassy entrance with eggs, tomatoes, and other foodstuffs. Baku police later broke up the demonstration and arrested some 18 participants after they presented a petition to embassy staff calling on France to close its embassy and end all investment in Azerbaijan. The same group also attempted to hold an earlier rally outside the Foreign Ministry building to protest the arrival of OSCE mediators, but demonstrators quickly dispersed by police. (RFE/RL)

TURKMEN LEADER IN 'MASS AMNESTY'

17 October

Turkmenistan's President Saparmurat Niyazov says he has pardoned some 10,000 prisoners in an annual amnesty.

The prisoners include eight men who were convicted of trying to assassinate him four years ago, he said. President Niyazov has pardoned tens of thousands of prisoners during his 15-year rule, which he says proves how much the state cares about its people. But the authoritarian ruler has been criticised for human rights abuses and for fostering a personality cult. President Niyazov said 10,056 men would be freed under the amnesty - the highest number of prisoners ever to be released at once. He said the number included eight of 50 men who were convicted of the November 2002 attempt on his life, because they had "repented". "The rest should be kept imprisoned, their guilt is excessive," he said. The prisoners are scheduled to be released on 19 October, the last day of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan. They will be required to pledge never to commit crimes again. Mr Niyazov - known as Turkmenbashi, or father of the Turkmen - has ruled the mainly Muslim desert state since Soviet times. He is known for issuing eccentric decrees on all aspects of behaviour, his pictures adorn public buildings and his "spiritual guidebook" is compulsory reading throughout Turkmenistan. But rights groups accuse him of running one of the world's most repressive regimes, tolerating no dissent and allowing no political or media freedoms. (BBC)

