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Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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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 & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. 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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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.

Field Reports: Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGdO. 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.

Svante E. Cornell

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BERDIMUKHAMMEDOV EMBARKS ON SIGNIFICANT EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

Chemen Durdiyeva

On June 12, President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov held a plenary Cabinet session at the Turkmen State University named after Turkmen poet Magtymguly and signed a major decree on the “perfection of science in Turkmenistan.” In accordance with this new decree, a new Higher Professional Examination Board of the High Council of Science and Technology and a new Foundation of Science and Technology were created. Within the framework of the latest changes in the socio-economic life of the country, Berdimukhammedov’s recent education reforms are decisively promising given the president’s relatively short period of time as a head of state.

BACKGROUND: A large-scale reformation of the educational system in Turkmenistan took roots with the adoption of the *Bilim* Program in May of 1993. Under the strong personal guidance of former President Saparmurat Niyazov, full compulsory education at all secondary schools was reduced to nine years, and the Cyrillic script changed to the Latin alphabet. Along with other major turnovers in the educational curriculum, the holy script *Ruhnama*, authored by Niyazov, became a textbook for virtually every single student in the country. Accordingly, education at higher educational establishments (16 in total) in the country were brought down to two years of theoretical knowledge and two years of practical work experience in the respective field of studies. But to be enrolled to the higher educational establishments in the country, applicants first had to get a two-year working experience pass in the field of their respective studies, and only then could their applications be considered. For instance, secondary school graduates were officially encouraged by authorities first to join the two-year obligatory military service and then apply for a university education.

This in turn had resulted in the influx of Turkmen prospective students to foreign universities, mainly in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. However, as President Niyazov personally proclaimed several times, students with education from non-authorized foreign universities abroad were not welcome in Turkmenistan, and neither would their diplomas be recognized nor would they be employed in the government sector. According to the report of the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative, a Vienna-based independent human rights organization, the Turkmenistan Ministry of Education in 2003 issued order no. 126, which stated that all specialists holding diplomas of higher education, received outside the country after 1993 would be dismissed from their jobs from June 2004. In so doing, the majority of the university graduates abroad tended to stay in their countries of study to earn a living. This inevitably created a brain drain in the country.

In the eyes of international community, the desperate situation regarding education in Turkmenistan appeared to have created a reasonable concern not only

for the country's future per se, but also raised fears that it might eventually create a conducive ground for a failed state in the region. In reports published in 2003 and 2004, the International Crisis Group (ICG) periodically warned the international community that if the political status quo was kept as such, it would create a "dangerously isolated and uneducated generation increasingly sucked into a vicious circle of drugs trafficking and abuse, and organized crime." However, Berdimukhammedov's recent initiatives, particularly his set of decrees on "perfection of national education" appear to have become an initial step to change the dire situation before it reaches its climax. It is noteworthy that Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, as newly elected president, started his first steps in politics by making immediate changes in the educational system of the country.

IMPLICATIONS: On March 17, 2007 President Berdimukhammedov signed a decree on limiting the use of the national state oath in public places, including educational establishments in Turkmenistan. Accordingly, if the schoolchildren would have started the usual school day with a solemn recital of the state oath, swearing loyalty to the motherland and Turkmenbashi the Great, now they use it once only at the school graduation ceremony. Moreover, the words "Turkmenbashi the Great" were changed to the "President of Turkmenistan". On the one hand, such changes might seem tiny, but on the other, it is one step toward steering clear of the elements of the one-time cult of personality in the educational system of Turkmenistan.

Earlier the same month, President Berdimukhammedov issued another important decree that introduced new fundamental changes particularly in the educational curriculum and teaching methodologies. Starting from September 2007, the weekly workload of a schoolteacher will be 24 hours (less than before) whereas a university professor's is 850 hours per annum. Full secondary education was brought back to 10 years, and the university education now stretches from five to six years. Moreover, secondary school graduates can go to university right

after graduating from secondary schools, without waiting for a two-year work experience pass as before.

Disciplines of physical training and social science, once eliminated from the school program, have been restored to the national curriculum again. Two to three year vocational colleges and professional schools will start enrolling secondary school graduates from September as well. What has caught the attention of the academics, schoolteachers and students the most is the fact that the president raised their monthly salaries and stipends by 40 percent beginning in the upcoming academic year in September. Such reforms, particularly the salary increases and the creation of extra job vacancies, in the meantime, make many qualified professors and scientists who either became victims of regular lay-offs or sought more profitable jobs at other fields, consider returning to educational establishments again.

At the June 12 meeting, speaking to a wide audience of government officials, representatives of public organizations, and scientists as well as students of major institutions, Berdimukhammedov focused the entire session solely on developing science in Turkmenistan. By opening the once-scaled down Academy of Sciences, the president created a Higher Professional Examination Board and a Foundation of Science and Technology to coordinate and finance the research dissertations of national academics. As such, the universities and other scientific institutions will start conferring masters and doctoral degrees from the coming academic year as well. As part of the national plan for the "perfection of science in Turkmenistan," the president commissioned the Ministry of Education to prepare an immediate plan for implementing the stated reforms and present a specific plan to connect all the educational and scientific institutions to the Internet.

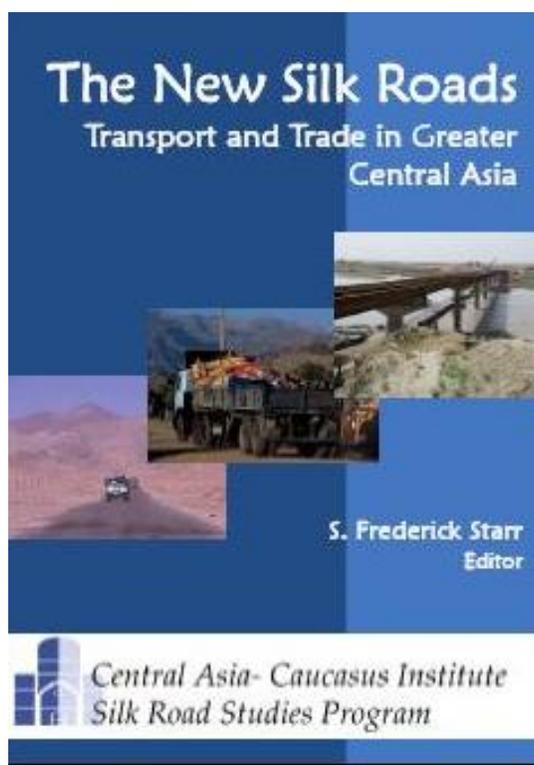
According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Turkmenistan, 10 schools in Ashgabat already have access to the World Wide Web. Under the joint UNDP-Ministry of Education project "Information sharing in Turkmenistan - for sustainable human development - InfoTuk" 10 more

schools will be connected to the Internet in Mary city as well. Official government sources say that in addition to these schools, 21 scientific and 15 higher educational establishments are presently using the Internet. As such, the schoolchildren, students and professors alike now have access to worldwide knowledge and information in a country where the Internet once was totally limited.

CONCLUSIONS: Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov's vigorous support for the development of education and science in Turkmenistan brings certain issues to the core of attention. First and foremost, the legal basis and

material support the president has given to the development of education and science in Turkmenistan provide a good chance to expand the intellectual opportunities of the young generation and thwart a massive longstanding indoctrination process in the country. Second, paying close attention to getting a proper education and increase enrollment in the universities may in fact facilitate a resolution to Turkmenistan's long-standing "brain-drain" and ensuing cadre problem.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Chemen Durdiyeva is an Ashgabat-based freelance writer.



New Book:

***The New Silk Roads:
Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia***

This 510-page volume containing 14 chapters examining the role of Eurasian countries from Turkey to China and Russia to India in the development of trade in Greater Central Asia is Edited by S. Frederick Starr.

The volume's chapters can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to Katarina Lesandric at katarina@jhu.edu.

RAMZAN KADYROV'S NEW CHALLENGES TO THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

Kevin Daniel Leahy

For months now, Ramzan Kadyrov has been calling for Russia's constitution to be altered so that President Putin would be allowed to stand for a third term. Putin, however, is on record as saying he does not want another term. Therefore, the time is fast approaching when Kadyrov must acknowledge, with as much grace as he can muster, that Putin will indeed be relinquishing the presidency for at least four years. Given the range of opponents now arrayed against him, Kadyrov will be in dire need of a powerful patron once Putin leaves office.

BACKGROUND: Ramzan Kadyrov's first four months in office have yielded a number of political triumphs. He successfully campaigned for Chechen convicts held in Russian jails to be allowed serve out their sentences in Chechnya. He also presided over – though the extent of his direct involvement is unclear – the assassinations of two top rebel field commanders, Tahir Bataev and Khairulla. A number of Kadyrov's political initiatives have also caught the public imagination, such as his campaign to have the so-called ORB-2 bureau and its detention facilities closed down. But not everything touched by the new president has turned to gold. Chechens' concern about the resumption of the military draft in their republic continues to fester. This, in large part, is because Kadyrov, who is actively preparing for its reintroduction, has yet to say whether Chechen draftees will be allowed to serve in their home republic (the preferred option for the vast majority) or whether they will be eligible for service anywhere in the Russian Federation. Kadyrov's response to the recent death of Boris Yeltsin also rankled with many Chechens. In a letter to Yeltsin's widow he stated: "It was with profound sorrow that the Chechen people took the news of the passing of your husband..." While Kadyrov could scarcely have painted Yeltsin in a

negative light, given the context, this was nevertheless a clear misrepresentation of most Chechens' attitudes toward Russia's first post-Soviet president, who presided over the first invasion of Chechnya in 1994.

Relations between Kadyrov and the Interior Ministry (MVD), at both local and federal levels, have degenerated markedly since the turn of the year. With respect to Kadyrov and the federal MVD structures, relations were most likely soured by the Chechen president's high-profile campaign against ORB-2, which operates under the auspices of the Southern Federal District's MVD department. The departure of Alu Alkhanov, a former MVD General and Kadyrov's immediate predecessor, from Chechnya's political scene may also have antagonized certain MVD officials. The recent decision by the Russian Interior Ministry to slash the salaries of Chechen policemen is most likely a calculated, and potentially fateful, response to Kadyrov's campaign against ORB-2. Many of these policemen are former rebels who were wooed over to the pro-Moscow side by promises of secure, well-paid employment. It has been reported that in some cases, policemen's salaries have been reduced by 50 percent with many feeling cheated and bitter as a result. Perhaps not coincidentally, this development has been accompanied by renewed

reports of conflict between Kadyrov and the leader of Chechnya's MVD-affiliated "Yug" battalion, Muslim Ilyasov. While Kadyrov's relations with the FSB and the Russian military have always been poor, until recently his relationship with the MVD was at least equivocal.

IMPLICATIONS: Kadyrov is opposed in principle to any representative(s) of federal authority being stationed in Chechnya indefinitely. Over the past seven years he and his late father, Akhmed-Hajji Kadyrov, have seen off a procession of Prime ministers – invariably Russians – imposed on them from above. The Kadyrov clan has also steadfastly insisted that the Russian military must eventually leave Chechnya. The latest overt manifestation of this implicit agenda involves the republic's prosecutor, Valeri Kuznetsov, one of the few remaining Russians in Kadyrov's government. A campaign to oust Kuznetsov from his post began in late January when he reacted sceptically to Kadyrov's aforementioned proposal to repatriate Chechen convicts. In mid-May Chechnya's human rights ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhazhiev, (seemingly fast on his way to becoming President Kadyrov's de facto deputy spokesman behind Dukvakha Abdurakhmanov) denounced Kuznetsov, accusing him of "criminal inactivity in protecting the rights of the local population." According to Nukhazhiev, Kadyrov is personally "dissatisfied" with the performance of the prosecutor; but why this sudden eagerness to rid himself of this relatively inconspicuous, virtually inconsequential official? Kadyrov's concern is not so much about Kuznetsov personally, but rather his station and the importance it might assume over the coming months. The Chechen president already has one eye on Russia's upcoming presidential election. Even a casual analysis of President Putin's public pronouncements over the past year will reveal a particular emphasis on fighting corruption. Indeed, the beckoning presidential contest may

well be preceded, or immediately followed by, a nationwide anti-corruption campaign with particular emphasis on corruption in the regions. In such a scenario, the role of the local prosecutor's office would assume greater significance. So too would regional-based federal organs in the mould of ORB-2.

Kadyrov's persistent, almost desperate, calls for Putin to remain in office for a third term betray a definite sense of insecurity on his part about his post-Putin relationship with the Kremlin. Essentially, the Putin-Kadyrov relationship is bereft of any real ideological or inter-personal depth and amounts to Kadyrov receiving a license to govern his fief as he sees fit in exchange for his perpetuating, and consolidating, the image of Chechnya as a peaceful, renascent society, emerging phoenix-like from the ashes of war.

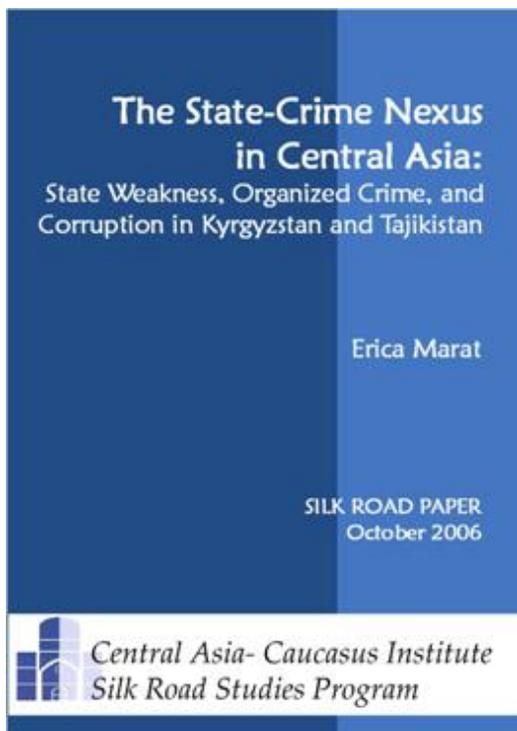
But Kadyrov's unwillingness (or perhaps inability) to cultivate a benign working relationship with federal agencies such as the MVD has, of late, made it especially difficult for him to hold up his end of the bargain. The MVD's decision to cut police salaries precipitated a plethora of rumors suggesting that dozens of law enforcement officers were joining the rebels. Given the ongoing campaign against Kuznetsov, it is perhaps not surprising that the federal Prosecutor-General's office was to the fore in spreading these rumors, announcing that together with the MVD, it was taking "all the necessary measures to detect such people."

CONCLUSIONS: It can now be said with authority that President Kadyrov has burned his proverbial bridges with all of the federal agencies currently active in Chechnya. On occasion, Kadyrov has shown a certain political deftness, but just as often he has manifested a virtually unparalleled capacity for making enemies gratuitously. To a large extent, local opposition to Kadyrov has been cowed: Alu Alkhanov has relocated to Moscow, while Said-Magomed Kakiev and Sulim Yamadaev may as

well have followed him, so inconspicuous have they become since his departure. But with Chechnya's rebel movement becoming increasingly active against a backdrop of popular discontent concerning issues like the economy and conscription, perhaps it would behoove Kadyrov to seek out some allies for a change. Kadyrov and his advisors are clearly worried about Russia's pending changing of the guard. In response, their strategy has been to agitate in favor of preserving the status quo rather than ingratiating themselves with either (or both) of the presidential frontrunners, Sergei Ivanov and Dimitri Medvedev. Given that Putin now seems certain to step down

early next year, out of sheer necessity, this strategy will soon be altered. As Kadyrov has singularly failed to cultivate good relations with his immediate federal superiors, he must take steps to ensure he has the ear of the next Russian president just as he did the last. Kadyrov has already met with Medvedev (generally viewed as the candidate best disposed toward Kadyrov) during April. A meeting between Ivanov and Kadyrov is expected to take place soon.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree from University College Cork, Ireland.



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.

GEORGIA AND THE CFE SAGA

Richard Weitz

From June 12 to 15, an extraordinary conference of signatory countries to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) convened in Vienna. The Russian government called the meeting, the first of its kind in the CFE's 17-year history, to resolve various disputes that had arisen between Moscow and other signatories. One of the main items in dispute concerns Russian military activities in Georgia. The conference failed to resolve this or other issues in contention, leaving uncertain the status of both the Treaty and the Russian military presence in Georgia.

BACKGROUND: The governments belonging to NATO and the now dismantled Warsaw Pact signed the original CFE Treaty in 1990. This complex document established equal ceilings of major conventional weapons (tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery pieces, combat aircraft and attack helicopters) for each bloc and within specified geographic regions. The treaty required the destruction of all armaments held in excess of these limits and established an elaborate inspection system to verify its fulfillment.

All 30 parties signed a CFE Adaptation Agreement at the OSCE summit in Istanbul in November 1999. The amended version replaced the obsolete bloc-to-bloc and zonal limits with a system of national and territorial boundaries. At present, only four of the signatories—Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Russia—have ratified the 1999 Adaptation Agreement. NATO governments have refused to do so until Russia fulfills the commitments made at the Istanbul summit to withdraw all its military bases from Georgia as well as Transdnistria, Moldova.

At the end of the Cold War, the Soviet armed forces occupied four military bases in Georgia. In 2001, Russia transferred the Vaziani military airfield outside Tbilisi to the Georgian government. It was

not until May 31, 2005, however, that the Russian and Georgian governments signed bilateral agreements in Sochi regarding two remaining bases. Under their terms, the Russia pledged to remove its military personnel and equipment from the bases in Akhalkalaki and Batumi by the end of 2007 and 2008, respectively. Georgia and the other CFE signatories agree that the Russian military is fulfilling these agreements according to schedule.

Nevertheless, controversy persists regarding the fourth facility. According to Moscow, the Russian military ceased using the base at Gudauta for combat operations in October 2001. The Russian government reports that only some 400 Russian military personnel remain there, and that half of these are retirees and dependents. It acknowledges that several combat and transport helicopters as well as other military vehicles and facilities also exist at the base, but affirms that their function is strictly to support the Russian troops assigned to the peacekeeping force in Abkhazia.

The Georgian government, along with other CFE members, has called for establishing a multinational inspection mission (including some Georgian nationals) at the base to evaluate the Russian claims and monitor military activities there. Thus far, however, the separatist authorities in Abkhazia,

backed by Moscow, have denied the Georgian government access to the Gudauta base.

Russian representatives deny that the CFE Treaty or Yeltsin's Istanbul commitments require them to authorize the creation of such an observation mission. At most, they have indicated interest in arranging for a one-time visit by foreign observers to certify the base's closure. Although they have participated in trilateral talks on the issue with German and Georgian representatives, Russian officials advocate bilateral talks between Russia and Georgia to resolve all remaining disputes.

Russian government officials also argue they need to support "peacekeeping" forces in Abkhazia and the other so-called "frozen" conflict regions of the former Soviet Union pending their resolution. The CFE Treaty does not directly limit the size or activities of peacekeeping units, many of which consist of former Soviet military personnel. The elaborate CFE inspection regime also does not encompass the "unaccounted-for treaty-limited equipment" possessed by separatist forces in Abkhazia and other conflict regions of the former Soviet Union. Much of this equipment is thought to be of Russian origin and has become a source for small arms traffickers throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa.

In addition, Russian policy makers insist their country needs more flexibility to deploy larger troop concentrations in southern Russia to counter Islamist-inspired terrorism in Chechnya and other areas. The CFE Treaty contains certain special "flank restrictions" to prevent the concentration of conventional heavy equipment in northeastern and southeastern Russia (primarily near Norway and Turkey, respectively). Russian officials also express concern that the treaty's provisions do not apply to U.S. military deployments in Bulgaria and Romania. They have called for more constraints on NATO military activities in southeastern Europe as well as the three Baltic states.

NATO representatives insist that their military activities in the Baltic region comply with existing CFE provisions. The Baltic governments, which

gained their independence after the drafting of the original CFE Treaty, have agreed to sign the Adapted CFE Treaty upon its coming into force. U.S. officials deny plans to establish large military bases in Bulgaria and Romania, describing them as "joint training facilities" that would only host U.S. forces on short-term rotations.

IMPLICATIONS: In his controversial February 2007 presentation before the Munich Security Conference, Russian President Vladimir Putin insisted that, "Our army is leaving Georgia, even according to an accelerated schedule. We resolved the problems we had with our Georgian colleagues, as everybody knows." In his state of the nation address in April 2007, Putin argued that the CFE Treaty "is not in any way legally bound to the Istanbul Agreements." He announced that the Russian government might impose a "moratorium" on its participation in the CFE process unless the other parties fulfilled their commitments. The Russian government subsequently called for the extraordinary CFE conference to address their concerns.

Before the Vienna conference, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried said that NATO countries would "make every effort to address Russian concerns seriously and creatively, but we will also keep faith both with our own principles and countries like Georgia and Moldova." Fried indicated that the U.S. government would consider further revisions in the treaty to meet Russia's concerns regarding its flank deployments, but only after Russia fulfilled its Istanbul commitments to withdraw its troops and munitions from Georgia and Moldova.

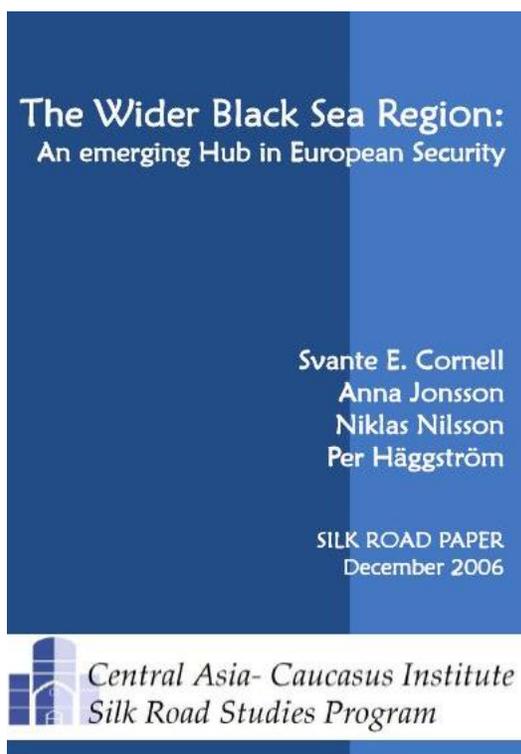
In the case of Gudauta, Fried indicated during the conference that the United States favored sending a "fact-finding" mission—which presumably sounded less confrontational to Moscow than a formal "inspection" mission—to clarify the situation there. He stressed Washington's flexibility regarding the precise modalities of any such inspection: "there are various ways in which it could be arranged. We're not rigid about this, so we hope it will be taken up."

At the extraordinary Vienna meeting, Anatoly Antonov, chief of the Foreign Ministry's Security and Disarmament Department and head of the Russian delegation, reaffirmed Moscow's commitment to conventional arms control in Europe. Nevertheless, he and the other Russian government officials continued to denounce the "artificial links" between Russian military troop withdrawal and CFE ratification.

After the session ended, Antonov complained that "no one listened to us. They continued to admonish us." To counter perceptions of being isolated, Russia secured a declaration supporting its position from its allies in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The statement appeared to have little practical effect since Armenia has yet to ratify the Adaptation Agreement and CSTO

members Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are not even parties to the CFE Treaty.

CONCLUSIONS: Antonov reasserted Putin's earlier warning that Russia might impose a unilateral "moratorium" on its CFE participation unless NATO countries ratified the 1999 Adaptation Agreement. Although the CFE does not have a clause regarding suspension, such a moratorium could include ignoring CFE provisions requiring inspections of Russian military forces or the pre-notification of major military movements. A moratorium could also see Russia concentrate more forces along its flanks than permitted by the CFE Treaty's quantitative limits.



New Silk Road Paper!

The Wider Black Sea Region: An Emerging Hub in European Security

by Svante Cornell, Anna Jonsson, Niklas Nilsson, and Per Häggström

This 120-page paper analyzes emerging role of the Wider Black Sea Region in European Security, and European interests there. It provides concise analysis of major challenges in the region, and policy recommendations for Europe's future policies there.

This 120-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.

VIOLENCE THREATENS TO RISE IN AFGHANISTAN'S NORTHERN PROVINCES

Haroun Mir

Since early 2007, the number of suicide bombings, political assassinations, and armed clashes has risen in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, which indicates a gradual deterioration of the situation in this relatively peaceful part of the country. While the Afghan government and NATO forces have focused on the insurgent-infested territories of southern and eastern Afghanistan, anti-government elements have become increasingly active in the northern and western provinces.

BACKGROUND: The Afghan government and NATO countries have spent most of their energy on reacting to the insurgency in the south, but have failed to put forward a clear vision to bring good governance and economic development to the relatively peaceful northern provinces. The growing public resentment, due to the perceived lack of progress in these provinces, does not appear to be taken seriously by the Afghan central government. The tragic incident of May 28, when the Afghan police shot dead 13 demonstrators in the town of Sheberghan, might be used as a prelude for further tension and clashes between the government forces and local population.

Contrary to the natural make-up of the Taliban, which is generally an exclusive movement of the Pashtun tribes of southwestern Afghanistan, ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks from the northern provinces of Afghanistan have also been active in their ranks. During the years of the resistance against the Soviet occupation, a considerable number of young Afghan refugees from the northern provinces had entered Pakistani madrassas. From 1996-2001, a sizeable number of young fighters from these provinces had been active in the Taliban.

For instance, more than 2,000 fighters from the province of Badakhshan alone were actively fighting the former Northern Alliance forces in the front lines north of Kabul. Presently, a significant number of the young madrassa graduates are ready to take arms against the Afghan government and NATO forces in the northern part of the country.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a close ally of Al-Qaeda and leader of Hezb-e-Islami, is originally from the province of Kunduz and still enjoys considerable influence in a number of northern provinces. He consistently sends messages to influential former mujahideen commanders in these provinces, inviting them to join him as the followers of late Ahmad Shah Massoud in the struggle against the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan. The potential for Hezb-e-Islami to recruit among religious zealots and the disenchanted former mujahideen commanders is considerable. A further deterioration of the situation in the northern provinces would allow Hezb-e-Islami sympathizers to vigorously reactivate their network of terror and anti-government propaganda.

Privileged relations with foreign countries has become the norm for the majority of Afghan politicians. The continued conflict in Afghanistan has provided an implicit legitimacy for the neighboring and regional countries to interfere directly in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Most Afghan leaders are on the payroll of these countries, and have become tools in the geopolitical game in Afghanistan. Sadly, leaders such as the late Ahmad Shah Massoud, who refused to be dictated by foreign countries, did not survive the conflict.

IMPLICATIONS: Growing public frustration provides an opportunity for anti-government forces to thrive and recruit among the population. The Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar have been able to reactivate their network of sympathizers in the northern provinces, where regional and neighboring countries have also re-established their covert activities. These provinces now risk slipping from the control of Afghan government as well.

For one, the Taliban's supporters in Pakistan allegedly seek to spread the conflict to the northern provinces of Afghanistan for two reasons. First, they want to prove to the rest of the world that the conflict in Afghanistan is not uniquely limited to the provinces bordering Pakistan. Secondly, the much publicized Taliban spring offensive did not take effect. Instead, the Taliban have been receiving severe blows at the hands of Afghan and NATO forces. The potential for eventual military conflict in northern Afghanistan would certainly take a considerable number of Afghan and NATO forces away from the insurgent battlegrounds of the southern and eastern provinces, where Pakistan prefers to dominate through its violent proxies.

Moreover, Afghanistan has become a proxy war between Iran and the West. The Iranian intelligence services have been particularly active in the western and northern parts of the country. Recently, American and British authorities have accused Iran of supporting the insurgents in Afghanistan with Iranian-made arms, ammunitions, and sophisticated explosive devices. Also, the massive expulsion of Afghan refugees from Iran is meant to create additional social and economic burdens on the Afghan government.

Iran has become the alternative for some of the local Afghan leaders against the Taliban movement and its backers and financiers in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Since the long-term presence of NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan appears improbable, Iranian authorities are willing to use their influence in northern and western Afghanistan to send a warning to the West that Iran's lack of cooperation in Afghanistan would cost the West dearly.

Of all the Afghan neighbors, the Central Asian regimes have the largest stake in Afghanistan's stability – but they remain under direct influence of Russia. A deterioration of the situation in northern Afghanistan would mean that their Islamist opposition, now based in Pakistan, could move their operational bases from the tribal areas of Pakistan to the mountains of northern Afghanistan and to the shores of the Oxus River. But the latest deterioration of relations between Russia and NATO will certainly have an impact in Afghanistan. Russia's lack of cooperation could seriously undermine NATO's stabilizing efforts in northern Afghanistan.

CONCLUSIONS: The majority of Afghans support the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan, but since most of them are

illiterate, they remain vulnerable to anti-Western propaganda and conspiracy theories that circulate throughout the country. The government and its NATO allies have had ample time in the past five years to promote honest and moderate interlocutors from the local population through traditional social and political mechanisms as government institutions have not yet gained their trust.

The main cause of conflict in Afghanistan has always been foreign interference. Despite the presence of major NATO forces in Afghanistan, the country remains vulnerable to the policies of its neighboring countries. The only way for the Afghan government to cut off the interference of its neighbors in Afghan

internal affairs is to reach out to ordinary Afghans. If the local population were to trust the central government, there would be less opportunity for the neighboring and regional countries to take advantage of the poor and downtrodden in Afghanistan. Regaining that trust will not be an easy task – but it is essential if any other, future efforts in Afghanistan are to lead to stability and peace.

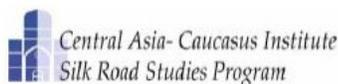
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The issue contains articles by Daniel Burghart, Michael Mihalka, Braekhus & Overland, Olga Olikier, and Sebastien Peyrouse, among other.

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

FIELD REPORTS

GUAM LEADERS DISCUSS CONFLICTS AND ENERGY IN BAKU

Niklas Nilsson

During June 18-19, the presidents of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine, and the Prime Minister of Moldova met in Baku for a summit of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development – GUAM. The summit was also attended by significant proponents of GUAM’s agenda within the EU, through the presidents of Poland, Lithuania and Romania. However, the summit failed to attract participation of the EU presidency and commission.

A main outcome of the meeting was the signing of a joint declaration stating that the members shall “expand cooperation with a view to promote democratic values, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, attain sustainable social and economic development and ensure security and stability in the GUAM region.” The unresolved conflicts over Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh dominated the agenda and the declaration specifically underlined the importance of settling

protracted conflicts in the GUAM region according to the principle of territorial integrity, and of resolving conflicts through reintegrating secessionist regions into state structures. According to these principles, the members drafted a resolution on the unresolved conflicts for submission to the UN General Assembly.



Georgia’s president Mikheil Saakashvili used the occasion for stating that “time is expiring” for South Ossetia’s de facto leader, Eduard Kokoity,

and that Tbilisi is planning to resolve this conflict shortly, however in a peaceful manner. According to Saakashvili, this will take place through negotiations on autonomy with South Ossetia's Tbilisi-supported provisional administration under Dmitri Sanakoyev.

With the member states displaying a common position on the unresolved conflicts, GUAM's potential for playing a role in their resolution was a topic for discussion, and the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, stated that GUAM's increasing international importance combined with the economic development of its members do grant it importance in this regard. Ahead of the summit, participants agreed to consider the previously discussed issue of creating a joint GUAM peacekeeping force. A stated ambition on the part of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, this would among other tasks develop a capability for deployment in conflict regions in GUAM countries under a UN or OSCE mandate, thus potentially replacing existing Russian CIS peacekeeping forces. However, it seems that skepticism among other GUAM members, especially on the part of Moldova, on the desirability of creating such a force provided for little progress on the issue.

Officials in Moscow reacted negatively to these discussions, stating that any deployment of GUAM peacekeepers in the conflict zones would be unacceptable to the regions in question, and that this initiative was intended to disrupt the functioning of existing institutions and current CIS peacekeeping operations in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. GUAM was furthermore described as a mainly U.S.-supported organization set on promoting anti-Russian policies.

Other discussions focused on enhancing the possibilities for transporting Caspian energy resources to Europe through GUAM countries, bypassing Russia. The viability of these plans is

jeopardized especially in light of the May 12 agreement between Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on future increases in Turkmen gas exports via Kazakhstan through the Russian pipeline network. However, the summit's main focus in terms of energy was on the previously proposed extension of the Odessa-Brody pipeline to Poland through Plock to Gdansk, and on possibilities of transporting Azerbaijani oil through this route and on to the West European market. Aliyev stated that planned increases in Azerbaijani oil production will suffice in filling the Odessa-Brody-Gdansk pipeline.

The formation of GUAM in 1997 was intended as an organizational alternative to the CIS, aimed at counteracting Russian influence over its near abroad. In its previous form, GUAM produced few concrete results, however the peaceful revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine and Azerbaijan's emergence as an energy player provided for a revitalization of the grouping, addressed at a meeting in Chisinau in 2005. The formation of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development - GUAM at a meeting in Kiev in 2006 aimed at institutionalizing GUAM into an international organization, rather than an informal group of former Soviet states. Measures included adopting a GUAM charter, introducing a secretary general and scheduling regular high-level meetings. During the Ukrainian chairmanship ending this month, little progress has nevertheless been made in terms of implementing the institutionalization process, and neither the Ukrainian, nor the Moldovan parliament has ratified the GUAM charter. It remains to be seen whether Azerbaijan's chairmanship starting in July will provide for more decisive steps toward granting GUAM credibility as an international organization.

KULOV'S PROPOSAL TO JOIN RUSSIA PICKED UP BY KYRGYZ, RUSSIAN MEDIA

Erica Marat

In early June, former Kyrgyz prime minister and current opposition leader Felix Kulov proposed that Kyrgyzstan join Russia in a confederation. Kulov's initiative instantly attracted public attention to his persona and sparked widespread discussions in the Kyrgyz and Russian media.

By joining Russia, Kulov suggests the resolution of two pressing problems in Kyrgyzstan. First, alleviating the north-south divide, and second, improving the national economy. In justifying his proposal, Kulov referred to the 150-year history of Kyrgyz-Russian diplomatic relations and the wish of the Kyrgyz people at all times to build stronger ties with Russia.

Today, as Kulov asserted, hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz citizens depend on work in Russia and are ready to vote for joining the former imperial center. He also claimed that Russia will not decline the proposal if Kyrgyzstan's decision is confirmed through a national referendum. Kulov intends to collect the necessary 300,000 signatures to organize a referendum this fall.

After failing to force president Kurmanbek Bakiyev to step down during the April 11-19 mass demonstrations, Kulov fell out of the political life for almost two months. Some Kyrgyz experts believe that by proposing a Russian-Kyrgyz confederation, Kulov tried to preempt similar intentions towards Russia on Bakiyev's part.

Kulov's proposal was met with sarcasm and skepticism in Russia. Mainly the Russian media responded to Kulov, while government officials ignored the proposal altogether. The Russian newspaper *Trud* published an article titled "In Kyrgyzstan, they don't know what confederation means", referring at the improbability of a Russian-Kyrgyz confederation. Another Russian newspaper, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, accused Kulov of

campaigning in Kyrgyzstan "at the expense of Russia". Russian political expert Aleksey Malashenko refuted Kulov's initiative out of hand, calling it another "dead model" of regional cooperation. Some Russian newspapers discussed the possibility of stronger integration of Kyrgyzstan with Russia on par with other pro-Moscow states like Kazakhstan, Armenia, Tajikistan and Belarus.

At the June 25 press conference in Bishkek, the Secretary General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Nikolay Bordyuzha, stated that "such steps [in integration of two nations] are justified and realistic in regards to security goals. But I think, the form is not important, the content is." In the future Russia might rely on Kulov's idea in strengthening the CSTO and other similar regional organizations.

In Kyrgyzstan, Kulov's idea of a confederation met with a mixed reaction. It tested the limits of even the most pro-Russian Kyrgyz politicians. Those who voiced their opinion on the matter were cynical about Russia's actual interest in having Kyrgyzstan as a dependent country. According to commentaries made in the Kyrgyz press, Russia is able to sustain its geopolitical weight even without the former Soviet states. It is by far a stronger international actor today than in the early 1990s.

Kyrgyzstan's greater integration with Russia could be fostered at the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit on August 16. Indeed, Kulov's proposal also impacts positively on Russian President Vladimir Putin's public rating in Russia and Kyrgyzstan. It indicates that Moscow does not need to play hardball to maintain the loyalty of the current Kyrgyz government, of Kyrgyz society for that matter.

Kulov's proposal granted pro-Russian state officials the opportunity to show their appreciation of the

northern neighbor before the SCO summit. Speaker of Parliament Marat Sultanov compared Kulov's idea of a Russian-Kyrgyz confederation with the European Union, while First Deputy State Secretary Adakhan Modumarov insisted that a legal base for such a union is necessary. Last December, Murat Zhurayev, a Kyrgyz parliamentarian from Batken, suggested entering the ruble zone in order to promote economic growth in Kyrgyzstan.

The most ardent opponents of Kulov's initiative warn that a confederation with Russia will inevitably lead to the loss of state sovereignty. However, the popular newspaper *Bely Parohod*, which shares most of Kulov's views, argues that Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty is rather symbolic as the country depends on its larger neighbors. The newspaper suggested that joining Russia is inevitable, but the process needs "to be a clean [initiative], not personified around any political figure".

Collecting 300,000 signatures to organize a referendum in Kyrgyzstan is not difficult if there are sufficient financial and human resources for the project. However, the referendum itself might turn out to be a failure, being short of a majority vote. The government will indeed try to prevent the

organization of the referendum, in order to prevent Kulov's growing popularity.

Yet Kulov himself seems to be more interested in the process rather than in the ends of his initiative. He managed to re-enter political life after his April fiasco. As Kulov warned, if the government intervenes into his initiative to organize a referendum, he will once again mobilize masses against the president and parliament.

Ironically, compared to Kulov's idea, Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev's suggestion to create a Central Asian Union first with Kyrgyzstan and later with the entire region did not provoke the same degree of discussion.

Kulov's suggestion is also an indirect contribution to the Kyrgyz government's accumulating fissures with the United States over the military base in Bishkek. As the SCO summit approaches, the Kyrgyz government is caught between Russia and the United States over its military cooperation. Anti-American views have been on the rise in Kyrgyzstan since the March 24 Tulip Revolution in 2005. Had this suggestion arrived when Kyrgyz-U.S. relations were at their zenith in 2001-2004, Russia might have reacted differently.

EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN LEAVES OPPOSITION FRUSTRATED

Marat Yermukanov

At the joint session of the senate and majilis (lower chamber of Kazakh parliament) on June 19 Nurbakh Rustemov, a member of parliament, read out a letter to President Nursultan Nazarbayev asking him to dissolve the majilis which, in his words, "obstructs the reforms' in the country. Nazarbayev was not slow to respond to the "will of people's

representatives" and with a stroke of a pen dissolved the lower chamber of parliament.

A day after majilis deputies issued a suicidal letter to the head of the state signed by 61 members of the lower house, President Nazarbayev, speaking at the meeting of the pro-presidential Nur Otan party, announced his decision to dissolve the lower chamber of parliament. "Taking into consideration

the fact that in your appeal you expressed the collective will of the people's representatives which was supported by our national Nur Otan party, I would like to assure you that I take this step seriously and weighing all pros and cons I must take a decision which best answers the interests of progressive development of our country," he said addressing the deputies who had signed the letter.

A situation in which parliament members give up their well-paid positions at their own will is something from the domain of the surreal. But, at closer look, there is a great deal of logic in the "collective madness" of the majilis deputies. After President Nazarbayev initiated a number of constitutional amendments last May, including new election procedures and mechanisms for the functioning of Parliament, majilis deputies found themselves in a precarious situation. The current composition of majilis includes 77 deputies, but according to the amendments to the election law, their number should be increased up to 107. According to new regulations, the senate members can take up the legislative functions of the majilis if the majilis is dissolved by presidential decree before its term ends. It was clear since the introduction of constitutional amendments that President Nazarbayev sought early parliamentary elections and that the dissolution of the majilis, whose term runs out in 2009, was waiting to happen. Doing what Nursultan Nazarbayev expected from them to do, many majilis members hope to regain their seats in parliament in new elections or to receive good positions in government. President Nazarbayev said he appreciated the "historic decision" of the majilis members and that every former majilis deputy would "stay on board" and be given good jobs.

The Central Election Committee announced that new elections to the majilis on party lists were scheduled for August 18, and elections of majilis members proposed by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan would be held on August 20. Regional elections to local legislative bodies (maslikhats) will be held simultaneously with those to the majilis. The chairman of the Central Election Committee, Kuandyk Turgankulov, expressed confidence that

parliamentary elections would be transparent, fair and open. Voters would be given the option of either using electronic voting machines or casting ballot papers.

At first glance, parliamentary elections this year have all the glamour of democratic voting. Proportional representation and the involvement of political parties into the election process on an unprecedented scale are welcomed by opposition. However, the tight schedule of early parliamentary elections, which caught mainstream opposition forces unprepared, greatly reduces the chances of political parties, other than the Nur Otan, to win seats in Parliament. Although in his political reform speech last May, Nursultan Nazarbayev promised financial aid from the state budget to political parties during the election campaign, Central Election Committee chairman Turgankulov said the new regulations were still under consideration and that political parties would have to rely on their own financial sources in this year's election campaign. In this situation, only Nazarbayev's Nur Otan party, with its practically inexhaustible resources, will be in a favorable position. To make problems more complicated for the opposition, the government recently adopted a law preventing political parties from uniting into election blocs. This restriction also gives Nur Otan, the most powerful and numerous party, an incontestable advantage over other contenders.

The only option left for other political parties in this circumstance is to merge with larger groups. Main opposition forces, such as the Nagyz Ak Zhol Democratic Party and Socialist Democratic Party, have already reached an agreement to form a single party. Similar attempts to join forces were made by the agrarian Adilet and Ak Zhol parties. The agrarian Aul and the Party of Patriots seem to be pondering the possibilities of a merger. But chances are not as good among other political groups and factions. The Communist Party of Kazakhstan and the People's Communist Party of Kazakhstan can hardly gloss over their long-standing mutual accusations. The weak and ambiguous Rukhaniyat party is simply ignored by others.

The upcoming parliamentary elections are likely to provoke the division of society along ethnic lines. Activists of Slavic national organizations hope for more seats in parliament. On June 10, popular writer Mukhtar Shakhanov announced the foundation of his Khalyk Rukhy (People's Will) party which declares the promotion of Kazakh language and culture and the revival of national moral values as a priority goal. But it is not likely that Khalyk Rukhy, if registered, will collect the necessary 50,000 signatures before the election.

Given the unequalled strong position of the ruling Nur Otan party, the governing elite need not to unnecessarily violate election procedures and resort to dishonest tactics. The current pre-election setting allows Nur Otan to win most of the seats in parliament without vote rigging or manipulating voting results. But it is already becoming clear that most political parties will not have time even to conduct a proper election campaign.

GEORGIAN TAX INITIATIVE QUESTIONED

Kakha Jibladze

Four months ago, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili announced a new tax initiative. While the government has boasted it will significantly lower the tax burden for businesses, tax experts and opposition politicians are questioning who will truly benefit from the changes.

The new tax amendment basically consists of abolishing the social tax (currently 20 percent of a worker's salary), reducing the profit tax by five percent but doubling the income tax (from 12 percent to 25 percent).

Although the president announced the changes during his state of the union address to the parliament in March, four months later the draft law has still not been considered by parliament. However, the changes have already been written into the budget for the next three years, including calculations for how much the tax cut will cost the government: 134 million Lari in 2008 due to the five percent cut in profit tax and 20 million Lari from the abolished social tax.

Alex Aleksishvili, the finance minister, told business people during a recent speech in Tbilisi that the idea of the tax is to encourage more businesses and more investments – thus making up for the initial blow to the budget with more overall tax payers. Tax experts, however, have questioned

exactly how much the new breakdown will help businesses.

By doing the math, the total savings to a business owner appears to be less than two percent – not exactly the tax break that dreams are made of. Especially considering the fact that Georgia already boasts of one of the most liberal tax codes in the region; since the Rose Revolution the number of taxes has fallen from over 20 to less than ten.

In addition, it is not clear who will really benefit from the new amendment. While business owners and employers will pay about 1.6 percent less in taxes than they were previously, their employees might have to pay considerably more. Adding to the confusion is the fact that in Georgia, many private sector employees negotiate based on the net take home pay – not the gross salary – so the tax burden will actually fall back on the employers themselves. And those workers who negotiated based on the gross salary, which allegedly includes most government sector employees, will be hit with the 25 percent income tax.

Another gray area concerns those taxpayers who are currently exempt from paying the social tax – a large and varied group that includes everyone from landlords to some foreigners. Non-Governmental Organizations could also be hard hit if their main

source of income, namely grants, is subjected to the new law.

According to the current draft law prepared by the ministry of finance, taxpayers who were except from the social tax will not be subject to the new tax (which should come into force in January 2008) until January 2011. However it is not clearly spelled out in the draft code exactly who those tax payers are or what will occur in three years.

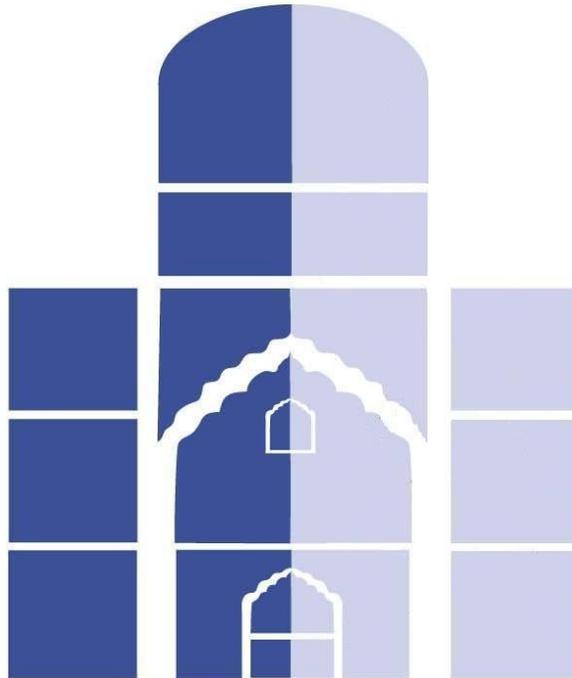
During a fundraising dinner with business people in May, President Saakashvili agreed that while his idea is to support businesses, employees should not be responsible for the total burden.

“I want us to thoroughly examine this [proposal]. The combined tax is aimed at making your life easier, but at the same time this new tax should not

make your employees’ lives more difficult. So we should thoroughly study it in order to avoid any gaffes.”

Common wisdom holds that any tax break is good news for business. However this initiative – as it is currently being promoted by the government – offers little to businesses and could potentially create financial havoc for employees.

Despite the fact that Georgia has one of the most liberal tax codes in the region, it does not offer large investors any real incentives to invest in the country in terms of tax breaks. If the government is interested in promoting investment, looking into creating tax breaks or lowering the country’s VAT could have a bigger, more positive impact than the 1.6 percent initiative that is being considered now.



NEWS DIGEST

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION SEEKS REFERENDUM ON UNION WITH RUSSIA

14 June

The Kyrgyz opposition movement United Front for a Worthy Future for Kyrgyzstan on June 14 formally submitted documents to the Justice Ministry requesting a national referendum to consider a proposal to form a union between Kyrgyzstan and Russia. An unnamed official from the Bishkek headquarters of the Ar-Namys (Dignity) party, which is a part of the United Front, said the documents meet all the legal requirements for a referendum, and added that "we hope that the Justice Ministry will officially register our campaign in the near future in line with the prescribed procedures." The opposition is also seeking Justice Ministry registration of an "initiative group" created specifically to advocate holding the referendum, and requested official state-issued "identification cards" to assist members in collecting signatures throughout the country. According to Kyrgyz law, any issue can be put forth in a referendum as long as at least 300,000 citizens sign a supporting petition. Earlier in June, former Prime Minister Feliks Kulov, the leader of the United Front, explained that "a union with Russia will preserve the unity of Kyrgyzstan and its people," and threatened to seek the dissolution of parliament if the Kyrgyz authorities failed to consider his proposal. (akipress.org)

KAZAKHSTAN, AFGHANISTAN TO FORM INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODY

14 June

In a statement released on June 14 in Astana, Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov announced the creation of a bilateral Kazakh-Afghan intergovernmental commission to boost investment and trade ties. The agreement to form the body was made in a meeting between Masimov and visiting Afghan First Vice President Ahmad Zia Mas'ud in Astana earlier the same day. Masimov also noted that the Kazakh government is currently

considering a special program on cooperation with Afghanistan aimed at strengthening Kazakh investment, agricultural trade, and the delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is also seeking Kazakh assistance in developing the country's large but underdeveloped mining sector. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI POLICE FORCIBLY DISPERSE DEMONSTRATION BY JOURNALISTS

15 June

Over 200 Azerbaijani police and security forces forcibly dispersed on June 14 a demonstration in Baku by a group of 50 journalists protesting the government's pressure on the media and suppression of freedom of speech, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reported. Police initially arrested Rauf Arifoglu, the editor of the opposition newspaper "Yeni Musavat," and two others before releasing them later in the day. One unnamed protester required hospitalization after police used force to break up the demonstration. An earlier plan to stage a rally to protest restrictions on media freedom by the journalists' group the Union of Editors was recently postponed to June 23 after the Baku municipal authorities ordered that it must be confined to within an area where extensive road construction is under way. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN SPEAKER URGES RUSSIA TO TAKE 'POSITIVE STEP' OVER SOUTH OSSETIA CONFLICT

15 June

Georgian parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze called on June 14 for Russia to take a "positive step" over the South Ossetia conflict, proposing that Russia agree to joint control over the Roki tunnel that connects South Ossetia with neighboring North Ossetia. Burdjanadze added that Georgia is "disposed toward continuing dialogue and promoting positive aspects" in its relationship with Russia. She made the comments while accompanying President Mikheil Saakashvili and

Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili on a state visit to France where they met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns in Paris. (Civil Georgia)

EU ENVOY MEETS WITH ARMENIAN OFFICIALS

15 June

Peter Semneby, the EU's special envoy for the South Caucasus, met in Yerevan on June 15 with top Armenian officials, including Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian, Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, and parliament speaker Tigran Torosian. Semneby stressed the need for Armenia and Azerbaijan to take "qualitative steps" and lay the foundation for the peaceful solution of the Karabakh conflict. He said the EU was disappointed that at their talks in St. Petersburg on June 9, the presidents of the two countries failed to make further progress toward such a solution. Semneby also said that the opinion of the disputed region's population should be taken into account. Sarkisian for his part criticized Azerbaijan's steadily increasing defense spending and the "lack of positive impulses" from Baku, which he contrasted with Armenia's "constructive" approach to resolving the conflict. He ruled out unilateral concessions on the part of Armenia, saying a solution should be based on mutual compromise. (Noyan Tapan)

KYRGYZ PREMIER REMAINS HOSPITALIZED IN TURKEY

15 June

Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev is continuing to receive medical treatment in a Turkish hospital, but is reported to "feel well" and in stable condition. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Atambaev on June 13 and discussed several issues in an hourlong meeting, including trade and economic relations and measures to promote Turkish investment in Kyrgyzstan. Atambaev is being treated for complications after being poisoned by an unknown toxin, which his doctors said caused "acute toxic hepatitis of indeterminate aetiology," or origin. Atambaev says that he became seriously ill from drinking water in his office on May 11, and that he was unconscious for two days after the incident. A round of medical tests confirmed that Atambaev was poisoned (RFE/RL)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT CONCLUDES VISIT TO IRAN

16 May

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov returned to Ashgabat on June 16 after a two-day state visit to Iran, where he met with Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad. In a meeting in Tehran with the Iranian president and senior officials, Berdymukhammedov signed several bilateral agreements, including new accords to expand railway links between the two countries. Trade between the two countries surpassed \$1.3 billion in 2006 and is expected to further increase as the level of Turkmen gas exports to Iran is projected to double this year. Berdymukhammedov also formally invited the Iranian president to visit Turkmenistan in the "near future." (ITAR-TASS)

BOMBING DAMAGES TAJIK SUPREME COURT BUILDING

18 June

An explosion on June 16 struck the Tajik Supreme Court building in the capital Dushanbe, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. No one was hurt in the explosion, although windows were shattered and a part of the structure was damaged. Dushanbe's chief prosecutor, Kurbonali Mukhabbatov, contended that "terrorists" may have been behind the attack, which he said was "aimed at intimidation." The incident appears to be linked to a series of explosions in January and June 2005 that Tajik authorities have attributed to a banned group known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The bombing also coincides with the first anniversary of three smaller explosions in different places in Dushanbe, which also did not result in any injuries. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT'S FORMER SON-IN-LAW ISSUES APOLOGY

18 June

In an interview published in Kazakhstan's "Vremya" newspaper on June 16, Rakhat Aliev, the former son-in-law of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, said he is "prepared to answer personally to the president" for his recent "political statements," and offered "apologies" to Nazarbaev. Aliev, who until recently was married to Nazarbaev's eldest daughter, Darigha Nazarbaeva, said he regretted a May 26 speech in which he decried the "curtailment of democratic processes in Kazakhstan," adding that the speech "was made in a fit of passion." He also stressed that he has not spoken out against the recently adopted

constitutional amendment allowing Nazarbaev to run for the presidency an unlimited number of times. A former Kazakh ambassador to Austria, Aliev is now facing extradition to Kazakhstan on criminal charges relating to the abduction and assault of two senior officials of Nurbank, a bank Aliev controls. The officials' abduction was allegedly intended to force them to sell their interests in a building in Almaty. Meanwhile, in comments during a visit to the northern city of Ustkamenogorsk, President Nazarbaev said on June 15 that he opposes a constitutional amendment that lifted the limit on the number of terms he can serve as president, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reported. The Kazakh parliament voted last month to remove the term limits for Kazakhstan's first president, allowing Nazarbaev, whose current term runs through 2012, to run as many times as he likes. Nazarbaev added that he "did not propose this amendment" and noted that he actually "reduced the presidential term from seven to five years and proposed that a president should be elected for a maximum of two successive terms." He did, however, sign the constitutional amendment into law after parliament approved it. (RFE/RL)

FATHER CLAIMS AZERBAIJANI YOUTH ACTIVIST MALTREATED IN JAIL

18 June

Jalal Bashirli has written to Council of Europe Secretary-General Terry Davis and to Andres Herkel, the Estonian parliamentarian who serves as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's rapporteur for Azerbaijan, to solicit their help in securing the release of his son, Ruslan. Ruslan Bashirli, a leading member of the youth organization Yeni Fikir (New Idea), was arrested in August 2005 and sentenced 11 months later to seven years' imprisonment on charges, which he denies, of accepting money from Armenian intelligence to try to overthrow the Azerbaijani leadership in the run-up to the November 2005 parliamentary elections. Jalal Bashirli claimed his son is being subjected to mental and physical abuse in jail. (day.az)

GUAM SUMMIT TO OPEN IN BAKU ON TUESDAY

19 June

A summit of the GUAM organization, which includes Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova, is to open in Baku on Tuesday. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, his Ukrainian

counterpart Viktor Yushchenko and Moldovan Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev arrived in the Azeri capital on Monday to attend the summit, which will also involve Polish President Lech Kaczynski, Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus and officials from other countries. Security, the fight against international terrorism, ways to ensure the security of transport corridors, and economic and humanitarian integration are expected to dominate the event's agenda. A declaration and a number of other documents are to be adopted at the end of the summit. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJAN READY FOR JOINT USE OF GABALA RADAR BY RUSSIA, U.S. - DEFENSE MINISTER

20 June

Azerbaijan is prepared for the joint use of the Gabala radar station by Russia and the United States, Azeri Defense Minister Safar Abiyev told Interfax. "During today's bilateral meeting in Moscow with Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, we confirmed Azerbaijan's preparedness for the joint use by Russia and the U.S. of the radar station in Gabala and signed a relevant protocol," Abiyev said. (Interfax-AVN)

NAZARBAYEV DISSOLVES LOWER CHAMBER OF KAZAKH PARLIAMENT

20 June

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev has announced the dissolution of the 3rd Majlis, the lower chamber of the parliament. The president explained his decision by an address from a number of Majlis members he received on Tuesday, in which the parliamentarians said they did not want to obstruct the implementation of political reform in the country. (Interfax)

NAZARBAYEV'S DAUGHTER CONFIRMS HER DIVORCE

20 June

Dariga Nazarbayeva, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's daughter, has confirmed that she and Rakhat Aliyev have divorced. "There are indeed a lot of rumors. I can confirm only one of them - about the divorce. This was a difficult trial for my family. I can only add that this was a painful and deliberate choice on my part," Nazarbayeva, a parliament member, told local media. Aliyev announced in an earlier interview that his marriage

with Nazarbayeva was officially ended at an Almaty court on June 6. (Interfax)

FOUR DEFENSE MINISTRY SERVICEMEN KILLED IN ARMED CLASH IN GROZNY

21 June

Four servicemen from the West battalion of the Russian Defense Ministry's 42nd motorized rifle division were killed in an armed clash in the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny on Wednesday night, a local police source told Interfax on Thursday. Traffic police stopped an UAZ jeep without license plates at a checkpoint on Staropromyslovskoye Highway on Wednesday evening, suspecting that the driver, who was a trainee from the West battalion, could have been drunk. (Interfax)

ANOTHER AMNESTY POSSIBLE FOR CHECHEN MILITANTS - PATRUSHEV

22 June

Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) head Nikolai Patrushev believes that another offer of amnesty could be extended to members of illegal armed groups, although he cautioned against repeating such actions too often. "I think it is possible to issue another appeal; however, of course it cannot be done too often," Patrushev said in the Federation Council on Friday when asked whether it was possible to offer another amnesty to militants this fall. Patrushev said that, judging by the results of previous appeals, "the action was useful and well organized." (Interfax)

OVER 30 MLN RUBLES RAISED IN CHECHNYA TO HELP SICK CHILDREN

24 June

Thirty-five million rubles have been collected in the Health of the Nation charitable action in Chechnya on Saturday to be spent on the medical treatment of children with congenital heart problems. "Initially, we planned to raise 10 million rubles, but the result has surpassed all our expectations," Chechen presidential chief of staff Abdulkakhir Izrailov told Interfax on Sunday. "People kept coming to the Dynamo stadium in Grozny, where the TV marathon was being held, to the last minute. The action continued late into the night," he said. "Some would donate large sums on condition of anonymity, while others would bring a mere ten rubles, but all of them contributed to an effort to save children," Izrailov said. The Bakulev Heart

Surgery Institute Director, Leo Bakeria, told Interfax that, "several dozen children suffering from congenital heart problems have been selected for emergency surgery." "Massive medical checkups on children were impossible in the troubled Chechnya, which made serious health problems common among children," Bakeria said. (Interfax)

PUTIN, ERDOGAN HAIL RUSSIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

25 June

President Vladimir Putin met with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan on Monday. The Turkish administration is grateful for Putin's attendance at the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization summit, Erdogan said. Putin's meetings in Istanbul were fruitful and Russian-Turkish relations are developing well, he said. Bilateral trade stands at \$21 billion and investment is rising steadily, a source told Interfax. (Interfax)

TURKEY SAYS AGREES WITH AZERBAIJAN ON SHAKH DENIZ

25 June

Turkey and Azerbaijan have resolved problems and reached an agreement on the Shakh Deniz project that will transport Caspian natural gas to European markets, Turkey's energy minister said on Monday. "It is out of the question that Turkey and Azerbaijan go to arbitration. I met (Azerbaijan's Industry and Energy Minister Natic) Aliyev last night and made an agreement on this issue," Hilmi Guler told Reuters on the sidelines of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation's summit. Turkey -- which is seeking to become an energy transit hub for the region -- had hoped to ship Azeri gas to Greece at the end of July but now expects this to be delayed to August. Azerbaijan produced natural gas at the Shakh Deniz field for a brief period in December but could not pump gas to Turkey due to technical problems, which have halved this year's production forecast. Turkey has pressed Baku to ensure a sustained flow of sufficient volumes of gas in the coming months and fulfil its contract pledges on delivery. The price of gas was another issue that remained to be resolved between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Turkey produces almost no natural gas or oil but is an important transit route from energy-rich Caspian and Central Asian countries to Europe. The \$4 billion Shakh Deniz project is operated jointly by BP and Norway's Statoil. (Reuters)

BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANIZATION WON'T DISCUSS CONFLICTS - LAVROV**25 June**

The jubilee summit of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization will discuss only issues that are defined in the organization's charter, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told the media in Istanbul. "An attempt to consider political issues, which obviously cannot be resolved in this format, would be unpromising," he said in answer to a question whether the summit may discuss the settlement of conflicts in the Black Sea zone. (Interfax)

NATO: AZERBAIJAN RADAR CANNOT BE WEST'S MISSILE SHIELD**26 June**

NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said that a Russian proposal for the United States to use a radar in Azerbaijan would not shield the West from possible missile attacks by so-called "rogue states." The radar, at Gabala, could not be an

alternative to the planned defense system in Europe, De Hoop Scheffer told a news conference at Interfax headquarters in Moscow on Tuesday. (Interfax)

OIL GIANT IRAN INTRODUCES GAS RATIONING**27 June**

Gasoline rationing was introduced in Iran on Wednesday despite the country's status as the second highest OPEC crude oil producer. Iran has a huge crude reserve but minimal refining capacity and therefore imports about 40 percent of its refined gasoline, Alalam Satellite TV reported from Tehran. Gasoline is heavily subsidized in Iran and even after Tehran imposed a 25 percent price hike, the price was raised to 11 cents a liter -- roughly 44 cents a gallon, the report said. In a statement on state television, the Oil Ministry said private cars would be rationed to about 25 gallons of gas per month, while licensed taxis would be eligible for 200 gallons. There was no indication given as to how long the rationing would remain in effect. (UPI)