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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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KEY ISSUE: A short 75-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 focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

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

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IS THE WEST LOSING THE ENERGY GAME IN THE CASPIAN?

Alman Mir Ismail

The EU and U.S. have been extremely slow in making the Nabucco pipeline come true, while Turkey is the main obstacle for the transit of Caspian gas to European markets. Gazprom, on the other hand, has been successful in starting negotiations with Azerbaijani officials to buy all of Azerbaijan's gas and thus, blocking its independent supply to the EU. Time is running against the EU and U.S. interests in the region. Unless radical and urgent steps are taken, Russia could deal a mortal blow to the East-West corridor, so well designed in the 1990s to diversify regional pipelines and energy transportation.

BACKGROUND: The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 2005 successfully cemented the East-West corridor idea for the transportation of Caspian oil to European and Asian markets. This pipeline, the first major pipeline to break Russia's monopoly on the regional pipeline infrastructure, is currently exporting 1 million barrels of Azerbaijani oil and is the driving force behind the economic development of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The BTC pipeline also became the driver for other regional transport projects, such as the South Caucasus gas pipeline and the Baku-Akhalkalaki-Kars railroad, among others.

BTC did not happen easily. Intense political lobbying, coordination and negotiation by the U.S., Turkish, Azerbaijani and Georgian governments helped to overcome the obstacles and objections to the project, created by Russia and other regional powers. At the end, BTC was a real success story, which completed the first phase of the East-West corridor and opened doors for other projects, more specifically for the transport of Central Asian gas and oil to the Western markets.

Since the completion of BTC, however, the West has been losing the game vis-à-vis Russia for the further development of the East-West energy corridor. This became apparent last year, as Russia openly showed its interest in purchasing all of

Azerbaijan's gas at world market prices. President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Baku in summer 2008 highlighted the peak of Russia's interest in Azerbaijani gas. Political pressures followed the commercial proposal. The Kremlin is doing everything in its powers to prevent the construction of the Nabucco pipeline, with a planned capacity of 30 billion cubic meters, and more generally the emergence of alternative supply of gas to EU markets. This way, political pressures from the Kremlin on European states can continue and the gas blackmail, similar to that which happened in January 2009 between Russia and Ukraine, can be repeated without a proper European reaction.

While Russian efforts are somewhat to be expected, Turkey's stubbornness in negotiations to allow Azerbaijani gas to transit through its territory towards Europe are raising eyebrows in the Azerbaijani capital. Officials in Baku are keen to export gas directly to Europe, hoping to reap some political benefits from it. Turkey, on the other hand, wants to buy Azerbaijani gas at a very cheap rate and then sell it onward to the EU in its own name. Since 2007, Turkey is already buying Azerbaijani gas from the Shah-Deniz field's phase I, but this transaction constitutes only a small portion of the field's full capacity. When agreeing to the terms of this first agreement, Azerbaijan

hoped that future volumes of gas would be allowed to cross Turkish territory on transit terms. Turkey, however, keeps insisting on its own rules of the game.

Recent negotiations between Armenia and Turkey and the Turkish government's desire to normalize relations with Armenia have further worsened relations between Ankara and Baku and led to further distrust and tensions between the two nations. In that respect, the fate of Nabucco is further put on hold.

The cold attitude to Nabucco from U.S. and European capitals is another source of concern. In April, the EU Commission voted to exclude Nabucco from the list of its priority projects, a move coming after intense pressures from Germany, Russia's main energy partner in EU. Although this step was corrected in the following weeks due mainly to Romanian diplomacy, the signal sent by Brussels to Azerbaijan was one leading to distrust and exasperation.

IMPLICATIONS: The lack of genuine interest for Nabucco from the U.S., EU and Turkey is making this project almost impossible to realize. Unless they receive strong political support from major geopolitical centers of the world, such grand regional projects are doomed to failure or stagnation – especially given Russia's active and often coercive energy diplomacy. While such support and coordination was evident in the case of BTC, it is extremely weak in the case of Nabucco.

Foremost, the relations between Turkey and the U.S. are of note in this respect. The two NATO allies were synchronizing their policies in the 1990s, and in fact, Turkey was often perceived as the promoter and agent of U.S. interests in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. But today, they are playing different games and experience substantial tensions in their bilateral relations.

This has to do with many factors, including the election of the AKP in 2002, Ankara's objections to Bush's war in Iraq, American support to the Armenian cause in the U.S. Congress and Kurdish rebels in Iraq. Thus, America has not been able to lobby Turkey enough on concessions on the Nabucco project.

On the other hand, the EU itself is torn apart by internal disagreements and the absence of a proper vision for the Black Sea region. It has failed to provide solid, needed and adequate support for this vital regional project. Some members of the EU fear a strong Russian reaction, while others lack financial resources to support the pipeline.

As a result of these failed policies and hesitant actions, Azerbaijan finally had no choice but to sign a memorandum of understanding with Gazprom about the start of negotiations on the sale of Azerbaijani gas to Russia. Official Baku cannot wait indefinitely. The production of natural gas from phase two of the Shah Deniz field has already been postponed by the consortium due to the lack of certainty regarding buyers and transit routes for the gas. And although Azerbaijan has been conducting negotiations with Greece and Bulgaria for the sale of small volumes of gas to these EU member states, it is obvious that these agreements are not enough to satisfy the needs of the Shah Deniz field.

CONCLUSIONS: Should Turkey's stubbornness and the lack of proper European and American support for the Nabucco project continue, Azerbaijan will have no choice but to sell its gas to Gazprom. In that case, Turkey and the EU will be the main losers. Turkey will have to buy the same Azerbaijani gas from Russia at a more expensive rate. In this respect, Turkey, looking for short-term benefits, will pay a high price for its inability to look at the situation strategically and for its unwillingness to invest into strategic projects

which would further cement Ankara's presence in the region.

With its close to 600 billion cubic meters of gas demand, the EU will continue to depend on Russia for gas deliveries. Russia is already supplying close to 40 percent of EU gas and is likely to further strengthen its control over European markets.

The saddest outcome of this conundrum would be the effect on the prospects for Trans-Caspian pipelines and for the export of Central Asian energy resources to European markets through the

South Caucasus. Should Gazprom succeed, the prospects of an East-West energy corridor would be closed for good. The Caspian basin, with its proven 9 trillion cubic meters of gas (with much higher estimated reserves) would fall into a near-complete dependence on Russia. The political consequences of this policy will be very dangerous both for the region and for the West.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Alman Mir Ismail is a Baku-based freelance writer.



Nabucco (Wikimedia)

RUSSIA AND NATO MANEUVER OVER GEORGIA

Richard Weitz

In recent weeks, the Russian government has taken steps to consolidate its hold over the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as affirm that all of Georgia falls within its zone of influence. Although desiring to improve relations with Moscow, NATO governments have rightly contested these Russian actions, which threaten to further weaken Western governments' already diminished influence in Eurasia. Moreover, Russia's visceral reaction to a long-planned NATO exercise in Georgia has indicated the level to which Moscow's rhetoric has increased.

BACKGROUND: On May 1, Russian border guards began patrolling the administrative boundaries separating Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia. The action implements the provisions of the two agreements signed between Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and the separatist leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Sergei Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoity, the day before in the Kremlin. Under their terms, the Russian government will police the regions' frontiers, including Abkhazia's Black Sea coastline, until the separatist regimes establish their own border security agencies with Moscow's assistance. The three men also signed cooperation agreements between the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and the security agencies of the two separatist regimes, the Abkhaz State Security Service and the South Ossetian Committee of State Security.

The Georgian Foreign Ministry denounced the agreements for violating international law and representing "yet another Russian attempt to strengthen the military build-up on Georgia's occupied territories and legitimize the occupation process." The Russian authorities have already announced plans to keep approximately 10,000 Russian soldiers in the two separatist regions indefinitely as well as

construct military bases on their territories, including a Black Sea naval base in Abkhazia. Western governments, which recognize the Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-South Ossetia boundaries as internal administrative boundaries within Georgian territory rather than as international frontiers between Georgia and independent countries, also denounced the move. Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, the current holder of the EU's rotating presidency, said that Moscow's action had destroyed the European Union's trust in Russia as a reliable partner. Except for Nicaragua and the equally isolated Hamas regime in Gaza, the world's other governments, including Moscow's closest allies within the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have declined to join Russia in recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries under Moscow's de facto control.

Even so, with the most recent security agreements, the Russian government is now able to exercise a degree of control within Abkhazia and South Ossetia equivalent to what Moscow would enjoy if it had formally annexed these Georgian territories. For example, the agreements exempt the Russian border agency from the jurisdiction of the regional authorities

while requiring the separatists to obtain Russian government consent to enter Russian property in either region.

Before its latest actions regarding Georgia, Russian officials had attacked NATO for preparing to conduct long-planned military exercises, "Cooperative Longbow/Lancer-09," in Georgia from May 6 through June 1. The purpose of the drills, held under the auspices of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP) program, is to rehearse integrated command-and-staff work among national militaries engaged in a large-scale crisis response action. The exercise scenario simulates multinational support for a UN-mandated, NATO-led operation. Although over 1,000 troops from NATO members and PFP partners will participate, the exercises will occur at Georgia's Vaziani military base, located 20 kilometers from Tbilisi, and not near the two separatist regions. In addition, the exercises will not involve live-fire drills or major conventional weapons. The troops will use computer programs and other electronic means to practice simulated joint operations.

Notwithstanding their peaceful intent or that Russian forces had been invited to participate in Cooperative Longbow/Lancer-09, Medvedev called the exercises an "open provocation" on

April 30, shortly after signing the border agreements. The President added that, "We view any actions that could be considered by Tbilisi as encouragement of a course towards the country's remilitarization and the senseless strengthening of military components as measures that run counter to the six principles of conflict settlement agreed last August." Medvedev's reference to the August 12, 2008, ceasefire agreement he negotiated with French President Nicolas Sarkozy is surprising since the Russian government has failed to adhere to its provisions requiring Moscow to reduce to prewar levels the number of Russian combat troops on Georgian territory.

IMPLICATIONS: Russian opposition to Cooperative Longbow/Lancer-09 reflects Moscow's determination to weaken security relations between Tbilisi and its Western allies. After the August fighting, Russian officials warned allied governments that Moscow's willingness to cooperate with NATO on Afghanistan and other alliance priorities would depend on NATO restricting its ties with Tbilisi. They threatened to sever all ties should Georgia receive alliance membership or even a formal NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), which would have improved but by no means ensured the realization of Tbilisi's NATO membership aspirations. Russian officials have also complained whenever NATO has sought to strengthen the Georgian military with arms or training.

It was only on April 29 of this year that NATO countries resumed high-level talks with the Russian government. On that day, the NATO-Russia Council formally met in Brussels again at the ambassador level. Since last August's Russian-Georgian War, the allies previously had only engaged in informal consultations with Russia's ambassador to



(Reuters)

NATO, Dmitry Rogozin. In an emergency meeting on August 19, the NATO foreign ministers denounced Russia's military response to Georgia's offensive in South Ossetia as "disproportionate." Earlier that month, the Russian military had occupied Georgian lands outside the disputed region of South Ossetia, attacked targets deep in Georgian territory, and helped expel Georgia troops from the other contested region of Abkhazia. NATO's August 19 decision excluded meetings between senior NATO and Russian officials, including sessions of the NATO-Russian Council, until Russian troops withdrew from newly occupied Georgian territory back to their prewar deployments, a development that has yet to occur. Russia retaliated by halting military cooperation programs with NATO.

Despite NATO's initial response, Russian policy makers might deem their military intervention a success because it has decreased the prospects of Georgia (or Ukraine) soon becoming a NATO member. Although the August 19 communiqué had denounced the idea of creating new dividing lines in Europe and reaffirmed the right of any country to join NATO, the foreign ministers simply restated their intent to review Georgia's application for a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at their meeting in December, as they agreed at the Bucharest summit four months earlier. NATO governments publicly reaffirmed their support both for Georgia's territorial integrity and Tbilisi's desire to join the alliance eventually, in order not to appear intimidated by Russia's forceful dismemberment of Georgia and threats of retaliation should NATO grant Georgia a MAP or membership. In private, however, many allied leaders indicated they were even less inclined than previously to

deepen Georgia's ties with NATO given the risks of becoming entrapped in another Russian-Georgian War.

In addition to using the imminent exercises to justify its two border protection agreements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian officials pressured other countries to shun the NATO exercises in southern Georgia. Although declining to recognize the two regions' independence, the governments of Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Serbia—all of which have close ties with Moscow—have announced that they will not participate in Cooperative Longbow/Lancer-09. Conversely, the United States and other NATO and Partner governments, including Azerbaijan, have also confirmed their involvement.

CONCLUSIONS: Russian authorities are using the upcoming NATO exercise as an opportunity to consolidate their de facto annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as to establish that all of Georgia falls within Moscow's sphere of influence. Russian officials aim to constrain Georgia's foreign and defense policies by keeping Georgia weak and NATO divided. The alliance's April 29 decision to expel two Soviet diplomats in retaliation for Russian espionage activities in Europe, along with NATO's refusal to cancel the Georgian exercises, shows that allied government refuse to acknowledge Russian hegemony in the South Caucasus despite Moscow's threats and blandishments.

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KYRGYZ REGIME USES ANTI-KURDISH PROTESTS FOR POLITICAL ENDS

Erica Marat

On April 26, a group of Kyrgyz and Russian villagers ransacked over a hundred houses belonging to ethnic Kurds, demanding they leave the Petrovka village in northern Kyrgyzstan. Inadequate and delayed responses from Kyrgyz state institutions – from the police forces and local government to the president – exacerbated the conflict. Despite the fate of thousands of ethnic Kurds being at stake, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev sought to use the conflict for his own ends. The president blamed opposition forces for inspiring the conflict, while local authorities supported the idea of forcing Kurdish families to leave in order to install peace in the village.

BACKGROUND: Over 100 Kurdish families living in the Petrovka village, 40 kilometers from Bishkek, were attacked by fellow villagers on April 26. The unrest unraveled after a 21-year old ethnic Kurd male resident allegedly raped a four year-old ethnic Russian girl. For weeks, Kyrgyz police delayed investigating the crime and punishing the man. According to local villagers, the girl's grandmother committed suicide, unable to cope with the tragedy. Aggravated by the inactiveness of law enforcement agencies, dozens of ethnic Kyrgyz fellow villagers decided to collectively punish Petrovka's entire Kurdish community. What began as minor unrest conducted by a few villagers ended in the mass ransacking of 110 houses. Hundreds of Petrovka residents, including ethnic Kyrgyz and Russians, broke windows, destroyed cars and threatened to seize cattle belonging to Kurdish families. Several Kurds were reportedly severely beaten, while some Kurdish households had to hide women and children to protect them from the aggressive mob. Unrest ended only when police was dispatched into the village and several dozen villagers were arrested.

Hours after the strife, several Kurdish families fled the village, seeking refuge in other villages.

According to some reports, up to 500 ethnic Kurds are currently hiding from law-enforcement and fellow Petrovka villagers. More Kurdish families are thinking about leaving the village for other parts of the country. But residents of other villages expressed their concern that Kurds might move into their territory and have threatened to force them out should they choose to do that. In the meantime, windows in Kurdish-inhabited houses were broken in neighboring villages as well.

Ethnic Kurds have been living in Central Asia for over six decades. They were forcefully moved into the region from the Caucasus by Stalin in 1937 and 1944. Some of them returned to the Caucasus after Stalin's death, while others remained in Central Asia. There are over 11,600 ethnic Kurds living in Kyrgyzstan, most being settled in villages in the northern parts of the country. Kyrgyzstan's Kurds have lost contact with relatives in the Caucasus, instead finding new links with Russian-speaking Kurdish Diasporas across the former Soviet states. In order to attain legal status in Central Asian states, Kurdish Diasporas must openly condemn separatist ideas promoted by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Raisa Sidorenko, a parliamentarian representing Petrovka and a member of the Bakiyev-led Ak Zhol party, rushed to blame the opposition forces for instigating the unrest. She was supported by a leader of the Kurdish Diaspora in Kyrgyzstan, Sulkhidin Kasymov, who also blamed opposition forces for provoking the conflict. Although Sidorenko and Kasymov's accusations lacked both argumentation and evidence, several opposition members were arrested along with the Petrovka villagers. Kasymov praised the efforts of law-enforcement structures for settling the conflict.

Yet Kurdish villagers have a different view of the conflict. Many complained that the entire community was judged for a crime committed by one of its members. Some expressed their concern that recent pogroms were intentionally politicized by the Kurdish Diaspora as well as the government. Kyrgyz opposition leaders reported that law enforcement representatives have in fact been persuading Petrovka villagers to blame the opposition. The ombudsman's office argued that Minister of Interior Moldomusa Kongantiyev must be held responsible for allowing inter-ethnic rivalries to escalate into violent conflict.

IMPLICATIONS: The Petrovka incident is not the first outbreak of inter-ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan. Similar hate crimes have been committed against Dungan, Chinese, Uyghur, Uzbek, Russian and other ethnic communities since the early 1990s. Inter-ethnic rivalries were used by local communities to advance their own position vis-à-vis other groups by accusing them for involvement in criminal activities and extortion of land. This time, however, the ruling regime is especially keen on using the conflict for its own purposes. The government blamed opposition forces shortly after the unrest despite the fact that state institutions

failed to act efficiently on virtually all levels. The local government is allied with the Interior Ministry, helping the latter persecute opposition leaders.

Bakiyev himself prefers the mob to decide the destiny of Petrovka's Kurds. At the March 4 meeting between representatives of Kyrgyz Diaspora and local residents, members of the elderly council came up with a list of families to be extorted from the village in order to restore peace. Petrovka residents demanded extradition of 50 Kurdish families from Petrovka. Some of elderly leaders are demanding that all 110 Kurdish families be extradited from Petrovka.

The CIS National Congress of Kurdistan, a Diaspora union, compares the Petrovka unrest with a similar occurrence in Kazakhstan in November 2007. Then, Kurdish families were forced out of a Kazakh village following a crime committed by an ethnic Kurdish teenager. The Congress argues that both Kazakh and Turkish authorities were interested in provoking this inter-ethnic rivalry to exacerbate radicalism practiced by Kurdish communities and link them to the PKK. Shortly before the unrests, both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan listed the PKK as a terrorist organization. Yet other conspiracy theories claim that the Kurdish Diaspora is consciously pursuing the status of refugees to be able to leave Kyrgyzstan.

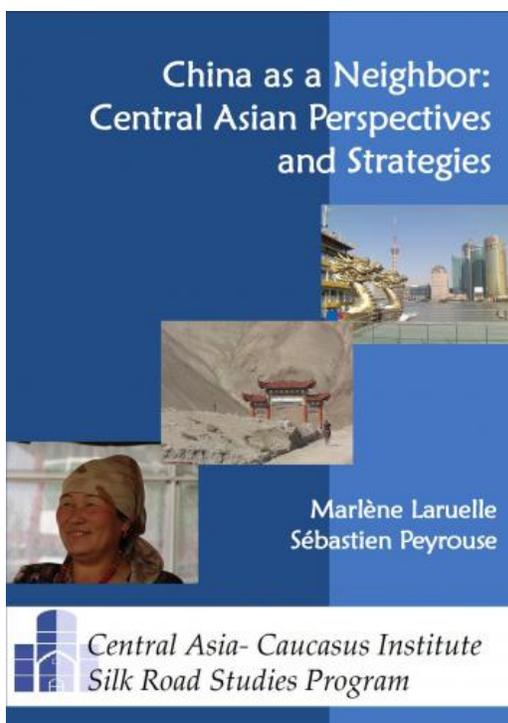
These conspiracies stem from the fact that Kurdish communities, along with other ethnic minorities, have little political representation across former Soviet states. In Kyrgyzstan, the Bakiyev regime sought to alienate political parties formed by ethnic minorities in the parliamentary elections in December 2007. Instead of promoting inter-ethnic tolerance among the grassroots, Bakiyev preferred to establish control over ethnic and religious leaders. Indeed, the Kurdish Diaspora's

accusation of the involvement of opposition forces involvement in the Petrovka unrest shows the government's pressure on its leaders.

For a brief period, the Petrovka incident diverted the general public's attention from Bakiyev's maneuverings to get re-elected this July. The Kurdish community is blamed for instigating unrest, engagement in drug trafficking and organized crime. Responding to populist fears, the head of the regional police Sabyrbek Kurmanaliyev, reported that he noticed an increase in complaints against Kurds throughout the country. Sadly, however, while Petrovka residents and the local government were debating over the suitable punishment of the Kurdish community for a misdeed of one of its members, several drunken policemen raped an orphan girl in Karakol town. The policemen remain invincible in the face of justice, while Karakol residents are reluctant to challenge law enforcement structures.

CONCLUSIONS: The Petrovka scandal in Kyrgyzstan exposed the government's failure to provide equal protection and rights to all citizens. Instead, Bakiyev quickly politicized the issue of inter-ethnic rivalry by arresting opposition leaders and establishing control over Diaspora leaders. The Kurdish community found itself in the midst of a political rivalry between the government and the opposition. Along with blaming the opposition, the government's engagement in settling the conflict remains limited. Bakiyev seems interested in having the Petrovka mob decide the Kurdish minority's future and protract the conflict. Should Bakiyev continue using inter-ethnic divides for his own purposes, more unrests are sure to take place.

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TURKISH-ARMENIAN BREAKTHROUGH MAY BE FAR AWAY

Haroutiun Khachatryan

On April 23, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Turkey and Switzerland published a joint statement regarding their success in efforts to normalize the relations between Armenia and Turkey. This document can be considered a milestone in the Turkish-Armenian negotiations that began in 2007 in Switzerland, with that country as a mediator, and which received renewed impetus following the meeting of the Presidents of the two countries in Yerevan in September 2008. However, the road map has not been published, and the parties seem to have many remaining obstacles hindering the real normalization of their relations.

BACKGROUND: Turkey was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Armenia after the breakdown of the USSR. However, the two countries never established diplomatic relations, and moreover, in April 1993, Turkey closed its border with Armenia as an act of solidarity with Azerbaijan, which was involved in an armed conflict with Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh, when Armenian forces took control over the Kelbajar region outside the disputed territory. In addition, Turkey imposed an embargo on imports of Armenian goods. As a result, Armenian exports to Turkey have been negligible ever since, whereas the Armenian market has been open for Turkish goods. For example, in 2008, Armenia imported Turkish goods worth US\$267 million, and Turkey was the sixth largest exporter to Armenia. Of course, these goods were imported through Georgian territory, as the land border remains closed. Turkey also stopped air communication with Armenia in 1993, but resumed it a year later. Currently, the two countries have direct air communication, and their airspace is open for each other's aircraft.

Since the cease-fire in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in 1994, Armenia has

maintained that it was seeking the re-opening the border and the normalization of bilateral relations with Turkey without preconditions. This position has been supported by the U.S. and European Union, and, following the August war in Georgia, by Russia as well. In response, Turkey presented two major preconditions: the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and Armenia's abandonment of the policy aimed at international recognition as genocide of the 1915 massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Turkey.

The April 22 statement read, among other, that "the two parties have achieved tangible progress and mutual understanding in this process and they have agreed on a comprehensive framework for the normalization of their bilateral relations in a mutually satisfactory manner. In this context, a road-map has been identified. This agreed basis provides a positive prospect for the on-going process." However, the 'road-map' itself has not been made public so far, which creates concerns about its real value, and even its existence. The officials refuse to comment on the document and only say that they hope it will be published "in the observable future", as Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan put it on April 25).



(The Armenian Reporter)

As the April 23 statement lacks a clear confirmation that the sides were set to reach a normalization of their bilateral relations without precondition, critics in Yerevan raised concerns that the Armenian leaders were going to make concessions in one of the above-mentioned issues, which Turkey had long presented as preconditions for normalization. In particular, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's recent statements that Turkey would not reopen its borders with Armenia unless the occupied Azerbaijani territories (evidently, those surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh) were freed stirred feelings in Yerevan. President Sargsyan said that these statements constituted a "violation of previously reached agreements."

IMPLICATIONS: The fact that the road map has been kept secret so far leads to the conclusion that the sides are not yet fully ready to present the results of their talks. Moreover, it seems that the final text of the roadmap may

not exist at all in ready format, given the fact that, according to the April 23 statement, it was just "identified," rather than agreed upon. If so, the decision to release the April 22 statement may have been imposed on the sides by a third party. Washington appears to be the most likely player to have done so. This is evident from the timing of the release of statement, namely, 1AM on April 23, Yerevan time. At that

hour, it was night both in Armenia and in Turkey, but it was daytime in Washington. That enabled the State Department to immediately issue its positive reaction to the document. This was the only combination of events that would enable U.S. president Barack Obama to avoid using the term "genocide" in his message on the next day, the anniversary of the 1915 killings. Obama had evidently promised Turkey not to use such language. However, during his election campaign, Obama had stated that the Armenian massacres of 1915 were an act of genocide and had promised to use this term as president. Obama was helped out of this quandary as he now could rationalize it by a need not to damage the reconciliation process announced by Ankara and Yerevan.

As for the parties themselves, Ankara appears to have more problems than Yerevan before a road map can be made public. Armenian officials strongly argue that the road map

contains no link either to Nagorno-Karabakh issue or to rescinding on genocide recognition. The publication of the Statement on April 23, on the eve of the official genocide commemoration day, gave way to criticism in Yerevan. It even resulted in the breakdown of the ruling four-party coalition, as one of its members, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutiun) with 3 seats in the 18-member cabinet decided to turn into opposition. The ARF may also oppose any agreement to officially recognize the current border between Armenia and Turkey, as it argues that these borders were drawn by the illegal Soviet authorities. These problems do not appear to cause too much trouble for Serzh Sargsyan.

Interestingly, the radical opposition Armenian National Congress, led by former President Levon Ter-Petrossian, expressed its support for Sargsyan's policy towards Turkey. The only difficult problem for the Armenian president may be his alleged agreement to create a joint Armenian-Turkish commission of scholars to "study the reality about the events of 1915," as the Turkish side names them. In fact, this agreement, if real, would be criticized not only by the ARF and most of the analysts, but also by Ter-Petrosian, who said, that by agreeing to create this Commission, Sargsyan has made the Genocide, a sacred issue for every Armenian, "a subject of bargain."

Ankara seems to have more difficult problems in reaching a normalization of relations with Armenia, which is seen as part of its policy of "zero problems with neighbors". The most

difficult problem is Azerbaijan's negative reaction of Azerbaijan. Baku is very unhappy with Ankara's attempt to de-link its policy toward Yerevan from the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Baku even hinted about the possibility of freezing economic relations with Turkey. In addition, Turkish opposition parties are very active in exploiting this sensitive issue, and accuse the government of "betraying" the interests of a "brother nation." The possible creation of a commission of scholars, in turn, may have both positive and negative consequences for the current Turkish establishment.

Intense contacts continue with the involvement of Moscow and Washington. It is not evident that in October 2009, during the next stage of the "football diplomacy" (and Serzh Sargsyan's possible visit to Istanbul), relations between Armenia and Turkey will be close to normal.

CONCLUSIONS: The April 23 statement raised expectations that the two countries were close to starting a process of normalization of relations and opening the common land border. Both countries are interested in normalization, as Armenia would gain evident economic benefits and Turkey would become a very active player in the South Caucasus. However, subsequent events have implied that a real "road map" of normalization may not be ready, and that the countries still have many obstacles to overcome before normalization becomes a real perspective.

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FIELD REPORTS

BORDER DELIMITATION PROBLEMS BETWEEN TAJIKISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

Erkin Akhmadov

On March 25, 2009, the Treaty on the State Border between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan came into force. The Treaty was adopted on October 5, 2002, and its content established most of the borderline between the two states. However, as with any case of border delimitation, the norms of the Treaty brought about certain changes for the people living in the areas near the border. Therefore, local media sources have reported several cases displaying the effects of border delimitation on ordinary people living nearby. While relations between neighboring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan can hardly be characterized as warm, especially in light of the ongoing water disputes, the situation on the border is very illustrative of the ongoing problems.

In order to understand the specificity and sensitivity of border issues in Central Asia, it should be recalled how the borders of the presently existing states came into being. In the early 1920s, the Soviet ruling authorities established the administrative borders of the Central Asian republics, drawing these neither according to natural geographic boundaries nor strict ethnic lines. Thus, after independence, different territorial claims arose in each state and the process of border delimitation and demarcation appeared a lengthy enterprise.

Thus, the press service of the Senate of Uzbekistan stated that “the Treaty will contribute to further international legal administration of the state border, providing its security, further deepening of cooperation between the two states on the basis of friendship and neighborliness, mutual respect and equality of rights.”

The first meeting of Uzbek and Tajik representatives took place on February 18-19, 2009. During the joint intergovernmental commission meeting, the parties were able to agree on 97 percent of the over 1,200 kilometer long state border, leaving only several hundred kilometers of the border line to be delimited. On April 29, 2009, the commission held another meeting. As Tajikistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported, the meeting aimed to continue the work on border delimitation and demarcation on the four sectors that were left, and to discuss some issues of bilateral cooperation.

Meanwhile, local media sources have covered several interesting stories concerning the situation of the people living near the border. One claimed that as a result of the border delimitation, the local authorities attempted to force the inhabitants in one of the villages on Tajik territory populated by ethnic Uzbeks to decline their Uzbek citizenship and accept Tajik. While there is no reliable proof of the reported activity, and irrespective of whether it reflects the official policy of the Tajik government, there are certainly settlements now populated by people under ‘disputed’ status. The aforementioned village, which is located on the border between Uzbekistan’s Samarqand region and Tajikistan is just one of the many that are located along the winding border. The Sogd region in Tajikistan also has several areas where people are faced with the choice of choosing citizenship and place of residence after the border delimitation. For many, it is hard to make such a choice, as they find themselves in situations in which the territory they lived on for many decades is now part of another state.

Moreover, since Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have a visa regime, once one changes citizenship, it will be very hard for that person to cross the border to visit relatives or friends.

Another event in relation to the border delimitation process took place on April 8, when special military sub-units of the national security service of Uzbekistan held anti-terrorist trainings on the border with Tajikistan. The trainings were conducted on the territory of "Uzmetkombinat" – a plant of ferrous metallurgy, the different facilities of which were divided after the border delimitation. Thus, the trainings seemed to be a demonstration of

power and readiness to protect the border from 'friendly' neighbors.

The border delimitation processes in Central Asia are not easy. This is especially true for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which have a long history of disputed areas and disagreements on various political, economic and social issues. Thus, while the intent of the international treaties and agreements is to stabilize the border between the states and ensure peaceful coexistence, special attention should perhaps be paid to ensuring that the everyday practice does not diverge from written principles.

NEW PLAN FOR AFGHANISTAN – THE ROLE OF UZBEKISTAN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Umida Hashimova

President Obama announced a new plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan on March 27, 2009. In the Central Asian context, two aspects of the plan beg closer scrutiny: the increase in military and civilian presence in Afghanistan, and the creation of a Contact Group that invites NATO, the Central Asian states, the Gulf nations, Iran, Russia, India and China to participate in resolving the Afghanistan issue.

Analysts can be divided into two groups regarding their opinions and forecasts on the implications of the new plan. One group argues that the deployment of more American troops will cause a new wave of fighting and resistance from radical groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which would become stronger and more organized. In other words, the increased military contingent is likely to escalate the conflict by pouring oil on the fire. The planned increase of American and other NATO soldiers on the Afghan-Pakistan border could scatter the radicals and drive them closer to Afghanistan's

borders with Central Asian states, which are relatively peaceful at the moment. A renewed concentration of the Taliban on the borders of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which in total share a border of 2,087 km with Afghanistan, would pose a threat of reanimating radical groups that have been mostly dormant since the Taliban lost control of Afghanistan. Another factor that threatens the security of Central Asia is the Taliban's hardening grip over the Afghan-Pakistan border areas and intensified suicide attacks inside Pakistan, intended to damage the already weak Pakistani government with the ultimate purpose of overthrowing it.

Another group of analysts forecast that increased troop levels will eventually lead to the elimination of Taliban and al Qaeda extremists. Indeed, this could become the result of the proposed Contact Group for Afghanistan and Pakistan, if realized and successful. The invited participants are expected to work together and

look for unified solutions. In theory, the initiative is a movement towards a new quality of relations between the East and West. In particular, the Central Asian states, whose role is usually underscored in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan, were for the first time invited by high level Western players to participate in resolving the Afghanistan issue. Here, it is worth mentioning an initiative proposed by the Uzbek President one year ago, namely to revive the "6+2" Contact Group that was active until 2001. He invited NATO to join the group, thus turning it into a "6+3" Contact Group. The Group would be comprised of all six countries that have immediate borders with Afghanistan: Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Pakistan, and China plus the U.S. and Russia. This proposal received no response and no follow up activities, statements or actions were made on this proposal so far. This lack of response by the international community may be the reason for Uzbekistan's notable absence from a recent meeting on Afghanistan in The Hague. It will therefore be interesting to see how the development of a new Contact Group, proposed by the American President, will be received by the Uzbek leadership. The proposal for a new Contact Group recognized the potential of Afghanistan's neighbors. If previously, NATO and the U.S. were solely relying on their military force to destroy the extremists, after seven years of single-minded efforts it appears the U.S. is ready for a more inclusive strategy.

As Uzbekistan chose its own strategy of socio-economic development, it developed its own

way of dealing with the Afghanistan issue as well. After the Taliban government was ousted, Uzbekistan prioritized the development of Afghanistan's economy instead of a military confrontation with extremism. The official stance has been that the 30 years of conflict in Afghanistan destroyed the socio-economic infrastructure and pauperized the population, creating an environment for recruiting new supporters of extremism. Uzbekistan has built 11 bridges that connect the south and north of Afghanistan. The delivery of electricity was resumed in 2002. Uzbekistan exports oil, ferrous metal, furniture, salt, non-alcoholic beverages and foodstuff to Afghanistan and imports fruits, nuts and olives from there. Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have held negotiations in the several areas. These include the reconstruction of an airport and power station in Mazar-i-Sharif; the building of an international Trans-Afghan corridor, including the first ever railroad in Afghanistan connecting Mazari-Sharif with the Hayraton checkpoint on the Uzbek-Afghan border. There is little doubt that Uzbekistan's contribution to development across its borders has contributed to northern Afghanistan's opium poppy-free status. Considering Uzbekistan's past experience in the reconstruction of infrastructure in Afghanistan, it could share its experience and contribute to upcoming projects to be launched in the framework of economic development. It is clear that rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure as well as initiating new projects is vital in both short-term and long-term strategies for solving the Afghanistan issue.

AUDIT LEADS TO SCANDAL FOR TAJIK NATIONAL BANK

Suhrob Majidov

The National Bank of Tajikistan made public a special audit report revealing the improper usage of several hundred million dollars and unprecedented criticism towards the former head of Tajikistan's National Bank, Murodali Alimardon, who is an acting deputy prime minister in Tajikistan's Government. The special independent audit of Tajikistan's National Bank was conducted by the international corporation Ernst & Young, following an agreement between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the government of Tajikistan. In order to provide transparency for the results of the audit, the report was published on the official website of the National Bank of Tajikistan as had been agreed by the IMF and the Government.

The National Bank of Tajikistan agreed to an independent audit by an international company after a financial scandal with the IMF caused by erroneous information provided by the Government of Tajikistan regarding the gold and currency reserves of the National Bank. As a result of the scandal, the IMF charged the National Bank of Tajikistan to pay US\$79 million of credits provided by the IMF and to submit to an independent audit. The aim of the audit was not only to provide an audit report, but also to elaborate recommendations for the Government on how to reconstruct the management and oversight structure of the National Bank.

The report reveals several facts about serious abuses by the National Bank's former leadership. The audit brought to light the fact that the National Bank was providing funds from the state reserve, including foreign loans, for firms investing in cotton. This scheme was designed by the former head of the National Bank, Murodali Alimardon, whom the report blames for misusing state funds. For instance, the National Bank provided the "Credit-Invest" company with US\$856 million for providing credits to the cotton sector. According to the audit, the former National Bank head had a conflict of interest

in this issue since his family members were shareholders of Credit-Invest. Furthermore, the report shows that Credit-Invest used part of the received funds aimed at the cotton sector for other purposes, including building a restaurant for US\$256,000. Meanwhile, Credit-Invest still owes US\$295 million to the National Bank. Ernst & Young experts claim that they faced problems in their work due to restricted access to required information. Thus, the auditors claim that they had access only to 13 percent of the required documentation. Furthermore, some accounting documents of Credit-Invest were simply burned, and most of the credits provided by the National Bank for the cotton sector were not even substantiated with necessary documents. The audit revealed that state funds in the range of US\$220 million aimed at supporting the cotton sector had simply disappeared.

In the conclusion to the report, Ernst & Young experts strongly recommend the National Bank to abandon the financing of private cotton firms. Moreover, experts recommend the Government to create a new system for accounting and monitoring the National Bank's activities, because the previous one was considered unreliable and non-transparent. They claimed that the Bank needs a new system of management and internal audit.

Despite the scandal, Murodali Alimardon retains his position in the Government. Alimardon argues that the engagement of the National Bank in direct financing of cotton investors was the only way to maintain the cotton sector during that period. "The period of transition was very difficult. The side effect of the period was the system of cotton financing", says Alimardon. He added that "there is no sense to disclaim liability for the facts mentioned in the audit report, but we need to remember that the scheme helped save the national economy at that time".

All in all, independent experts say that the audit results may put the Tajik Government's further cooperation with international financial institutions under question. They say that the scope of the financial scandal may undermine the Government's credibility and threaten foreign investments at a time of global economic crisis. Nevertheless, despite the results of the audit, the IMF approved a new

three year financing program for Tajikistan, which amounts to US\$120 million. In order to receive these funds the Government agreed to fulfill the IMF's requirements –to implement the recommendations presented in the audit report and to reconstruct the structure of the National Bank, making it transparent and accountable to the Government and the Parliament.

EXPROPRIATION OF PROPERTY GENERATES FRUSTRATION IN TAJIKISTAN

Rustam Turaev

Tajik president Emomali Rakhmon appears to be losing common ground with Moscow, as Russian president Dmitry Medvedev set aside joint agreements on the Roghun hydro-electric power plant. Tajik authorities perceive the Roghun project as a necessity and apply all means necessary to have it accomplished, but so far to no avail. Also, Rakhmon sought financial support from the EU and returned with promising agreements on multi-dimensional cooperation. Yet, the overwhelming spotlight on the nation's father figure left other, internal issues unresolved.

The latest property dispute over the closure of the Zarnisor market is a reminder to the citizens that "power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely". Despite being underreported, property deprivations remain amid the most discussed issues in Dushanbe nowadays.

In brief, Deputy Prosecutor S. Sirojzoda filed a court case against the legalization of the Zarnisor market before the Economic Court of Dushanbe. Notably, Sirojzoda filed the claim while acting as Public Prosecutor, since the head of the Office was on leave. The Court upheld the claim of the plaintiff, despite the official response of the returned Prosecutor that the property's registration had been conducted in accordance with the state legislature.

"... Police appeared in September, encircled the market and allowed no one in," said a market trader. "... Previously, I worked in the 82 mikrorayon market, we were driven out the same way and then the Profsoyuz place was closed as well, this is the third market we are expelled from."

However, the point to be made has little to do with illegal prosecution. For years, the issue of property deprivation has caused significant job losses in the country. Zarnisor alone could have created five hundred jobs – not insignificant in light of the ongoing crisis. Moreover, the rate of remittances from labor migrants is expected to decline sharply over the coming years due to the slipping Russian economy, which has an unemployment figure of six million people. The unwillingness of the government to promote small business may prove to be a fatal mistake.

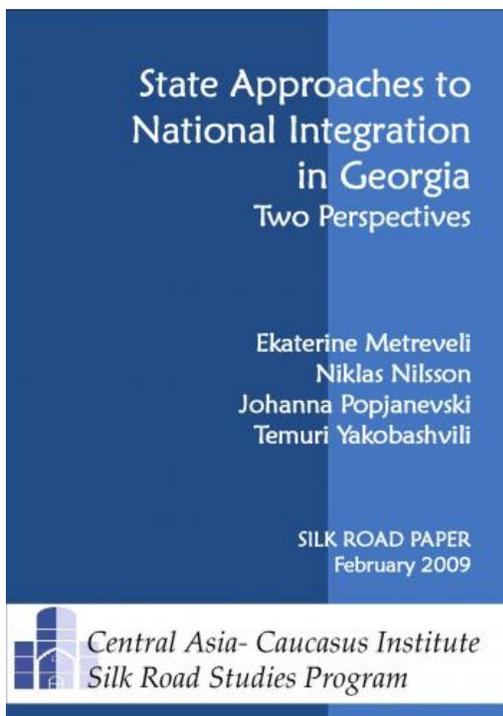
Local markets in Dushanbe remain an alternative for individuals to earn income within the country and may serve as an option for guest workers who failed to find jobs in Russia. Unfortunate migrants are likely to largely seek to return to Tajikistan to make a living, with the authorities seeking to prevent them from doing so. An inability and reluctance to meet the demands of what is the largest able-bodied part of the population will inevitably create discontent among the masses, causing irretrievable damage to the country.

Moreover, not only has entrepreneurship been hard-hit, so has the local intelligentsia. A renowned professor of International Relations at the Russian-Tajik Slavic University, Guzel Maitdinova, was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison on fabricated charges of assaulting a police officer, when she refused to leave her property during an unsanctioned eviction. The Dushanbe city administration decided on the destruction of the professor's house without any prior notification of the owner, thus contradicting the relevant Civil Code provision. Following the disagreement, Maitdinova filed an appeal to the District Court of Somoni rayon, and a senior deputy to the prosecutor requested the appeal to be sustained. The District Court, however, decided to dismiss it. Through resisting the Court decision further, the scholar was deprived of her property rights by force and sent to jail.

The epidemic rise of property assaults has also taken a religious turn, as the hundred-year old synagogue belonging to the local Jewish community

was demolished in a matter of hours. The decision on the destruction of the synagogue was seen as inevitable as a US\$300 million project of the "House of Nations" was scheduled to be built in the same area, and was a far higher priority for the local authorities.

The logic behind the expulsions is quite simple. The position of any appointed politician is extremely fragile at any time in Tajikistan. So, from the moment of obtaining a seat in a ministry or local governance, decision-makers take advantage of their positions to accumulate maximum profit while in office. The Zarnisor case is the most revealing to date, and previous examples also hint at the self-enrichment factor as a driving force behind the decisions. It is commonly believed that Maitdinova's trial sets a serious precedent for further eviction practices in the center of the city, where the scholar resided for over fifteen years. Not surprisingly, the location of the synagogue is very close to Maitdinova's former residence.



New Silk Road Paper:

State Approaches to National Integration in Georgia: Two Perspectives

**By Ekaterine Metreveli, Niklas Nilsson,
Johanna Popjanevski, and Temuri
Yakobashvili**

This Silk Road Paper examines Georgian national integration policies, with a view to identify key prospects and problems in Georgia's efforts to become a unitary state.

The Silk Road Paper can be downloaded free at www.silkroadstudies.org. Hardcopy requests should be addressed to

NEWS DIGEST

AZERBAIJAN DEFENSE MINISTER VISITS TURKEY

24 April

Azerbaijan's Defense Minister, colonel-general Safar Abiyev has arrived in Turkey for an official visit at the invitation of Turkish Chief of General Staff Ilker Basbug.

They will discuss security issues in the region and prospects for military and technical cooperation between the two countries. The Azeri Defense Minister also will have meetings with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, chairman of Turkish parliament Koksal Toptan, Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul and undersecretary for Defense Industries Murad Bayar. (AzerTAc)

CENTRAL ASIAN LEADERS FAIL TO OVERCOME DIFFERENCES AT WATER SUMMIT

28 May

A rare Central Asia summit of the five founding members of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea revealed some common ground on that issue -- but nevertheless ended in bitter disagreement. Meeting in the southeastern Kazakh city of Almaty for a one-day summit, the presidents of all five Central Asian states failed to overcome differences over water use. Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev exposed the real bone of contention among the states during his address -- energy shortages, the construction of new hydropower stations, and concerns by downstream states as to how their water supplies will be affected. "The strategic issue that requires resolution is the coordination of our timetables of water release for irrigation and energy needs and compensatory fuel supplies [to Kyrgyzstan], and this is what should be the subject of international cooperation among parties interested in using water-saving technologies," Bakiyev said. The comments by Bakiyev, whose "upstream" country is looking at hydropower as an answer to its energy needs, triggered an angry reaction from a "downstream" counterpart, Uzbek President Islam Karimov. "It was agreed that the only issue to be discussed at the current summit and the expanded summit would be

the activities of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and its main tasks in the future," Karimov said.

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, representing another country keen on taking advantage of its ample water resources to produce electricity, also refused to introduce the water issue into the talks and was apparently angered by other leaders' assertions that water-supplying countries were responsible for water shortages. "I thought we agreed not to discuss hydroenergy issues," Rahmon said. "I proposed it and you and the other colleagues agreed. And now there's a whole discussion being started. I also have something to say about it." The summit's host, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, later produced a statement focusing only on the decline of the Aral Sea. The document was signed by all five Central Asian leaders, including Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov of Turkmenistan. (RFE/RL)

BANNED RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION EXPOSED IN DAGESTAN

28 April

Law-enforcement bodies in Dagestan have exposed the Nurdzhular religious organization, whose activities in the Russian Federation were banned by the resolution of the Russian Supreme Court dated April 10, 2008. The group was exposed in a joint operation by the Interior Ministry and the regional department of the Federal Security Service (UFSB)," an UFSB spokesman told Itar-Tass on Tuesday. "Police have zeroed in on an address in the town of Izberbash, at which members of this religious organizations held meetings."

"The group included nine Russian citizens, seven Azerbaijanis and Nurdzhular coordinator Erdemir Ali Ishan, a Turkish citizen. "The Turk, during his stay in Russia in 2009, called meetings of activists of this organization in Moscow, St.Petersburg, Kaliningrad, Kostroma, Yaroslavl, Kazan and Krasnoyarsk.

"During the meetings, the activists were studying extremist literature and discussed further plans for the operation of the organization in Russia. "In the course of the inspection of personal effects of Nurdzhular members, police found financial

documents stating the spending of 72,000 dollars on propaganda in Dagestan. In addition, a large amount of literature, including certain publications have been retrieved, recognized as extremist by the ruling of Moscow' Kopevo district court dated May 21, 2007. "The identities of all the members of the religious organization have been ascertained. They have been questioned. At present, the Azerbaijani citizens and the Turk remain in custody. The others have been set free," the UFSB said. (Itar-Tass)

ASHGABAT AGREES ON TAPI GAS SUPPLIES

29 April

Ashgabat awarded gas-reserves certification from its Yasrak gas field to Islamabad for exports through the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. Asim Hussain, a top energy negotiator from Pakistan, led a delegation to Ashgabat to discuss the TAPI project. Turkmen officials said they would offer gas from the Yasrak field instead of the Dovletabad field for the route, Pakistan's daily The News International reports. The Yasrak gas field boasts reserves of more than 4 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Pakistan had expressed reservations over the security of the planned route through Afghanistan, however, proposing a new route that passes through less Afghan territory. Hussain led talks last week, meanwhile, to discuss gas from the Dovletabad field for re-export through the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline.

Hussain told The News that if there were no major breakthroughs on the TAPI pipeline, Turkmenistan could ship its gas through IPI. In the latest developments, Ashgabat said the talks on the IPI re-exports had not yet reached formal status. (UPI)

NATIONAL SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY TO BE CREATED IN KAZAKHSTAN

29 April

National School of Public Policy for preparation of political public servants will be created in Kazakhstan. The rector of Government Academy at the President of Kazakhstan, Bahyt Esekin, said at the international scientifically-practical conference 'Struggle against Corruption Strategy: Problems and Priorities', the agency reports. "The school is being created along with our colleagues from Singapore, most non-corrupt civil servants in the world according to the index of non-corrupt civil servants," B. Esekin informed.

According to the rector, the school will begin its

work on the basis of the Academy in 2009 - 2010. 19 Master's students of the Academy are having internship in School of Public Policy in Singapore University. (Kazakhstan Today)

GUN ATTACK OCCURRED AT STATE OIL ACADEMY OF AZERBAIJAN

30 April

Today the shooting has taken place at the second building of the Azerbaijan's State Oil Academy in the center of Baku. The gun attack occurred shortly after morning classes began at the Academy. A gunman burst in the building of the Academy opening fire on people inside. Reportedly several students including foreigners as well as the teachers of the Academy were killed and injured as a result of the crime. According to the Azerbaijan Ministry of Health, thirteen people have been killed and ten wounded in shooting. Police and heads of the Azerbaijan law-enforcement agencies remained at the scene of the shooting and all roads leading to the Academy were blocked. (AzerTAc)

IRANIAN NEWS AGENCY OPENS BUREAU IN TAJIKISTAN

1 May

The Iranian Fars News Agency has opened a news bureau in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. The Dushanbe staff is made up only of Tajik journalists. Fars Managing Director Hamid Reza Moghaddam-Far told RFE/RL that the agency plans to organize workshops for Tajik journalists in Tajikistan and Iran. Fars is planning more offices in other Central Asian countries as well as in Afghanistan and southeastern Asia. Fars is a privately owned news agency, but is considered close to the Iranian judiciary. Founded in 2002, it produces news in Persian, English, Turkish, and Arabic. (RFE/RL)

WORLD BANK ASSIGNS \$2 BILLION FOR KAZAKHSTAN'S ROAD PROJECT

1 May

The World Bank has decided to issue a \$2.12 billion loan to Kazakhstan for modernizing the trade route connecting Russia and Western Europe to China and other Asian states. The project will build up competitiveness of Kazakhstan and bring substantial benefits to that country and its neighbors, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the World Bank said. The loan will create about 35,000 jobs, which is vital amidst the crisis. It is planned to build anew and renovate over 1,000

kilometers of roads between Chimkent and Aktyubinsk. That is part of Kazakhstan's program of the modernization of the 2,800-kilometer way from the Russian to Chinese border. Also, the World Bank continues to support the development of Tajikistan's health care system. Another grant of \$5 million was approved on Thursday. (Itar-Tass)

IMF FORECASTS 'SEVERE SHOCK' FOR TAJIKISTAN

1 May

Tajikistan faces "a severe external shock" because the global economic crisis will cut remittances and depress exports this year, the International Monetary Fund said. Most of Tajikistan's hard currency earnings come from aluminium and cotton exports as well as remittances. It said transfers from Tajiks working abroad, mostly in Russia, are projected to decline by 30 percent this year, "threatening the livelihoods of many poor households that depend on remittances for basic income". Economic growth is set to slow to 2 percent this year from 7.9 percent in 2008. The value of exports is seen shrinking 7 percent to \$756 million. The fund urged reforms in the agricultural sector and at state-run companies. "...Tajikistan is facing a severe external shock from the global economic crisis, the effects of which are compounded by domestic rigidities," the IMF said in a statement. "Continued heavy state influence over markets and poor energy infrastructure put prospects for faster growth at risk," the IMF said. "Poverty remains widespread, and could increase as the economic outlook deteriorates." Some analysts have expressed concerns over the social stability in the former Soviet republic bordering Afghanistan. The United States plans to transit non-military supplies for its Afghan troops through the impoverished Central Asian state. "(IMF directors) stressed the need to push forward with agricultural sector reforms to remove rigidities and secure macroeconomic stability and growth," it said. "Efforts will also be needed to enhance transparency and accountability in state-owned enterprises." (Reuters)

AT LEAST 26 DEAD IN BUS CRASH

2 May

A bus crashed in southern Uzbekistan Saturday, killing at least 26 people and injuring another 20, government officials said. The Mercedes passenger bus, with 50 people aboard, smashed into a tractor parked on the side of the Guzor-Chim-Kukdala

highway, a spokesman from the Interior Ministry told RIA Novosti. (UPI)

NATO GAMES IN GEORGIA DRAW FIRE FROM RUSSIA

3 May

NATO begins military exercises in Georgia on Wednesday in a gesture of solidarity condemned by Russia as "muscle-flexing" coming nine months after war between the former Soviet neighbors. Around 1,000 soldiers from over a dozen NATO member states and partners will practice "crisis response" at a Georgian army base east of Tbilisi, around 70 kilometers (44 miles) from the nearest Russian troop positions in breakaway South Ossetia. Last year's five-day war, when Moscow crushed a Georgian assault on pro-Russia South Ossetia, slammed the brakes on Georgia's bid for membership of NATO, which the Kremlin fiercely opposes as an encroachment on its ex-Soviet backyard. The month-long exercises at a former Russian air force base in Vaziani are seen as a signal from the 28-member alliance that, despite doubts over the promise of eventual membership, Georgia has not been forgotten. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev accused NATO of "muscle-flexing" and said the decision to go ahead with the exercises was wrong and dangerous. Relations had been on the mend. NATO and Russia last week resumed formal contacts suspended over the war, when the West accused Moscow of a "disproportionate" response to Georgia's assault on separatists in South Ossetia. But the exercises, coupled with the expulsion last week of two Russian diplomats from NATO over a spying scandal and a Russian decision to take control of South Ossetia's borders, have put the relationship under renewed pressure. "Anything involving NATO and Georgia is very sensitive for Moscow," said Maria Lipman of the Moscow Carnegie Center. "The idea of NATO exercises in Georgia of all places was sure to provoke angry statements from the Russian establishment." (Reuters)

KADYROV VOWS TO IMPROVE CHECHNYA

3 May

Chechen Republic President Ramzan Kadyrov said Sunday he will make Chechnya prosperous within a decade and then resign his post. Kadyrov was quoted by the Austrian newspaper Die Presse as saying he is fully prepared to move on with his life once "everything comes to normal" in Russia's

North Caucasus republic, RIA Novosti reported. "I still need to solve several tasks before everything comes to normal and then I'll engage in something else I am still young, I want to live, see the world and devote time to myself and my family," Kadyrov reportedly said. Kadyrov, 32, was appointed leader of the Chechen Republic by Russia in 2007 following the assassination of his father, then-Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov. RIA Novosti said in the wake of the assassination by forces loyal to the late militant leader Shamil Basayev, Kadyrov has helped decrease militant activity in Chechnya while facing allegations of human rights abuses. (UPI)

AFGHAN PRESIDENT TO RUN FOR REELECTION

4 May

President Hamid Karzai registered as a candidate for Afghanistan's August presidential election Monday, a vote he appears in a strong position to win given the lack of high-profile opponents he is likely to face. But Karzai's selection of Mohammed Fahim -- a powerful warlord accused of human rights violations -- as his senior vice presidential running mate drew immediate criticism. Human Rights Watch said that Fahim has the blood of Afghans on his hands from the 1990s civil war era and that Karzai was "insulting the country" with the choice. "To see Fahim back in the heart of government would be a terrible step backwards for Afghanistan," said Brad Adams, the group's Asia director. "He is widely believed by many Afghans to be still involved in many illegal activities, including running armed militias, as well as giving cover to criminal gangs and drug traffickers." Fahim served as Karzai's vice president in the interim government put in place after the ouster of the Taliban in the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. In the 2004 election, Karzai dropped Fahim from his ticket in favor of Ahmed Zia Massoud -- the brother of resistance hero Ahmed Shah Massoud, who was assassinated by al-Qaeda two days before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Massoud has publicly criticized Karzai in recent months for staying on as president after May 21, the date the Afghan constitution says Karzai's term ends. The U.S. Embassy here declined to discuss the choice of Fahim, saying it was not helpful for the United States to comment on individual candidates. A U.S. statement, however, said, "We believe the election is an opportunity for Afghanistan to move forward with leaders who will strengthen national unity." Immediately after

registering, Karzai left for Washington for meetings Wednesday with President Obama and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. In a reminder of the country's perilous security, a suicide bombing, a roadside bomb and an insurgent attack killed 24 people Monday in three separate incidents. The bomber attacked a mayor in Laghman province, killing six people, including the mayor and his nephew, officials said. In Zabol province, a roadside bomb struck a family on a tractor, killing 12 people, and insurgents later attacked a convoy and killed six security guards. (AP)

AZERBAIJAN'S WTO MEMBERSHIP BEING DISCUSSED IN GENEVA

4 May

Baku, 4 May The issue on Azerbaijan's WTO accession is being discussed in an event organized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva. Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmud Mammadgulyev and his accompanying delegation attend the event.

During the event, the Azerbaijani delegation will put forward new proposals for goods and services and conduct talks with Japan, Ecuador, Sri-Lanka, India, Norway, Switzerland and other countries on WTO membership. (AzerTAc)

KABUL DISCOUNTS REPORTS OF U.S. SOLDIERS DISTRIBUTING BIBLES

5 May

The U.S. military says it confiscated and destroyed a shipment of Christian Bibles sent to a U.S. soldier at a base in Afghanistan about a year ago to ensure that troops did not breach regulations against proselytizing. The Bibles -- published in the Pashto and Dari languages -- are the cause of controversy in Afghanistan after Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television recently broadcast a report about the shipment. That report suggested that some U.S. soldiers had, on their own accord, been trying to distribute Bibles to Afghans. The report also questioned whether U.S. soldiers violated the laws of both Afghanistan and the U.S. military by doing so. Siamak Heravi, a spokesman for Afghan President Hamid Karzai, downplayed the significance of the report. Heravi told RFE/RL that Kabul would not tolerate policies by foreign forces that allow the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials aimed at converting Afghan Muslims. "We read this report. First of all, we strongly deny it. No power that is based in Afghanistan would be allowed to [do this]," Heravi

said. "We are discussing this issue. But according to preliminary reports we got from U.S. authorities, this report is false and hypocritical and baseless." Under Afghanistan's internationally backed constitution, it is a crime in the country to try to convert a Muslim to another religious faith. Afghan Muslims who do convert to another religion face a possible death sentence under Afghan law. Wary of the sensitivities of the issue, U.S. Central Command has issued General Order No. 1, which forbids troops on active duty from trying to convert people to another religion. That rule applies to all U.S. soldiers based in Afghanistan and Iraq. (RFE/RL)

MOD SAYS MILITARY UNIT MUTINIES

5 May

Davit Sikharulidze, the Georgian defense minister, said a tank battalion based in Mukhrovani, close to Tbilisi, staged mutiny on Tuesday morning. "Some civilians, who have nothing to do with the battalion, are also there," Sikharulidze told Rustavi 2 TV in a phone interview. "They have not put forth any concrete demand," he added. The Georgian Interior Ministry said earlier that "a full-scale" military mutiny was planned in the Georgian army by some former military officials, who were "in coordination with Russia." "As it seems this mutiny was coordinated with Russia and aimed at minimum thwarting NATO military exercises and maximum organizing full-scale military mutiny in the country," Shota Utiashvili, head of the information and analytical department of the Interior Ministry, said on May 5. He said that Gia Gvaladze, who was commander of the Defense Ministry's special task force in 1990s, was arrested in connection with plotting of the mutiny. Defense Minister Sikharulidze also said that apart of thwarting the planned NATO exercises, which are scheduled to start on May 6, the mutiny possibly also aimed at overthrowing the government. The Interior Ministry has also released a video footage, recorded apparently with a body-worn covert camera and showing a man, purportedly Gia Gvaladze, talking to several persons. There were at least three persons, apart of Gvaladze - faces of two men were blurred in order not to identify them and the third one to whom the body-worn camera was attached. When speaking about the planned mutiny Gvaladze mentions names of former senior military and security officials, including of Davit Tevzadze, a former defense minister; Jemal Gakhokidze, a former security minister; Koba Kobaladze, a former

commander of national guard and Gia Karkarashvili, a commander of the Georgian army during the Abkhaz war in early 90s. Karkarashvili is now affiliated with Irakli Alasania's political team, part of opposition Alliance for Georgia. Gvaladze says that these people would be supporting the planned mutiny. He also says in the footage that murder of some senior officials and President Saakashvili's close allies were also planned, including Giga Bokeria, deputy foreign minister; Vano Merabishvili, the interior minister and Gigi Ugulava, the Tbilisi mayor. The man also says in the footage that 5,000-strong Russian troops would move in and take positions at key east-west highway close to Tbilisi. Road leading to the Mukhrovani base has been sealed off by the law enforcement agencies. The Georgian army battle tanks were seen heading towards the Mukhrovani base. (Civil Georgia)

ARMENIA MAY PULL OUT OF NATO-LED DRILLS IN GEORGIA

5 May

Armenia will not take part in the upcoming NATO-led Cooperative Longbow /Cooperative Lancer 2009 military exercises in Georgia, an Armenian newspaper said on Tuesday, citing unnamed sources. The Aravot newspaper said the decision was made after a meeting last Wednesday in Brussels between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at which the NATO chief supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Relations have been tense for more than two decades between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorny Karabakh, a region in Azerbaijan with a largely Armenian population. The region declared its independence in a 1991 after a referendum boycotted by local Azerbaijanis. The ensuing conflict claimed some 35,000 lives before a ceasefire was signed in 1994. The area technically remains part of Azerbaijan, but has its own de facto government. However, Armenian authorities have not yet officially confirmed the country's withdrawal from the NATO exercises. Armenian Foreign Ministry told RIA Novosti on Tuesday that the situation "was still unclear." The Cooperative Longbow/Cooperative Lancer 2009 command-and-staff exercise, which Russia has criticized as unhelpful in the wake of last summer's armed conflict between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia, is scheduled for May 6-June 1. According to NATO, the drills are aimed at improving

interoperability between NATO and partner countries, within the framework of Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative programs, and will not involve any light or heavy weaponry. Over 1,300 troops from 19 NATO member or ally states were originally scheduled to participate, but Kazakhstan, Latvia, Estonia, Moldova and Serbia have already withdrawn. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan confirmed on May 1 its participation in the NATO-led exercises, and stressed the country's commitment to relations with NATO and its active participation in the Individual Partnership Action Plan. (RIA Novosti)

EX-AFGHAN FOREIGN MINISTER TO RUN AGAINST KARZAI

6 May

A former Afghan foreign minister has registered to run for president, but other opposition figures had yet to make clear if they would unite to give one candidate the best chance of ousting Hamid Karzai. Candidates have until May 8 to register for the August 20 election. Karzai registered on May 4 hours before flying to the United States for his first meeting with Barack Obama since he was elected U.S. president. So far, the opposition has had little success in uniting behind a single candidate with a broad enough base of support to challenge Karzai, who has led the country since U.S.-backed Afghan forces ousted the Taliban government in 2001. Abdullah Abdullah, who was one of the senior figures in the anti-Taliban alliance before 2001 and then served as Karzai's foreign minister until 2006, registered to stand on May 6 and told reporters he would give more power to the regions. He would push to reduce the president's authority, create a post of prime minister responsible to parliament, and hold direct elections for governors and mayors. "Decentralizing the system is one of the difficulties that Afghanistan is facing," he said. "All major decisions are (now) taken under particular circumstances by a particular team, and Afghanistan's people have a lesser participation." The call for regional autonomy could help him win support among provincial bosses who bristle at central authority under Karzai, who now has the power to appoint and fire governors. Abdullah is half-Tajik and half-Pashtun, with shared heritage from the two largest ethnic groups in the country. But he is mainly linked to Tajiks due to a long-standing association with the late Tajik guerrilla leader Ahmad Shah Mas'ud. He named a former

royalist Pashtun and a member of the Hazara minority as his two running mates. But he could face difficulty winning support from the Pashtuns who form Afghanistan's biggest ethnic bloc. Karzai and most other leading opposition candidates are Pashtuns. Several of the Pashtun rivals have been in talks to field a single candidate to run against Karzai, but have yet to reveal their plans with just two days left to register. One of the main Pashtun candidates, regional Governor Gul Agha Sherzai, pulled out of the race abruptly on May 2, apparently to back Karzai. Another opposition leader, former Tajik guerrilla chief Mohammad Qasim Fahim, quit Abdullah's National Front opposition group to run as one of Karzai's running mates. (Reuters)

GEORGIAN OPPOSITION, POLICE CLASH IN TBILISI

6 May

Dozens of opposition supporters in Georgia have clashed with police at the main police station in the capital, Tbilisi. Television pictures showed police and protesters striking each other with batons and sticks across a metal gate dividing them. An Interior Ministry spokesman said protesters had tried to enter the police compound. Tbilisi had been braced for possible confrontation between police and protesters who have been blocking streets since April 9, demanding the resignation of President Mikheil Saakashvili over his record on democracy and last year's disastrous war with giant neighbor Russia. The opposition said protest leader Giorgi Gachechiladze had been detained and several other opposition leaders had been beaten. The police said the protesters had been throwing stones and sticks at them. Interior Ministry spokesman Shota Utiashvili denied Gachechiladze had been arrested, but said he had climbed over the gate into the police compound and was still there. The protesters marched to the police station, demanding the release of three activists arrested on May 6 over the alleged beating of a journalist at the public broadcaster in Tbilisi. "We know that they were trying to enter the police compound and wanted to release their activists from the cells," Utiashvili said. (Reuters)