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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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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.

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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.

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Svante E. Cornell

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GENGHIS KHAN AND MOVIES IN EURASIA

Dmitry Shlapentokh

Several movies on Genghis Khan and related themes have recently appeared in Eurasian countries. Each of them, and especially the response to them by the general public, indicates geopolitical shifts in Eurasia, as well as the desire of the ethnic Russian elite to play a leading role in the Russian Federation and, possibly, in the entire post-Soviet space. At the same time, this turn to Genghis Khan by some intellectuals from Russia's ethnic minorities indicates persistent ethnic tension in Russia.

BACKGROUND: One could assume that the growing interest in Genghis Khan could just be attributed to the 800th anniversary of the rise of his enormous empire. This could be explained in the case of Mongolia, where the anniversary in 2006 was celebrated with great pomp to affirm Mongolian post-Communist nationalism, and where one of the movies of Genghis Khan was created. Still, the appearance of the movies on Genghis Khan in Eurasian countries cannot be explained by the fact of the anniversary alone. It has much deeper roots. In fact, the rise of interest in this or that historical figure is related to geopolitical trends, assertion of power, and the centrality of this or that civilization. The movies on Alexander the Great reflect the USA's desire to ensure its domination of the Middle East, its geopolitical centrality in general, which quite a few Americans relate with the domination of the West in general. At the same time, the movie 300 focused not on the triumph of the Greek-Macedonian armies, but on the desperate stand of 300 Spartans against the superior forces of Persians, indicating the perceived weakening of the USA – or, one might state, the West – against the increasing pressure of Asia. And it is this reason why movies about Genghis Khan have become so popular. And while Alexander the Great symbolizes the assertion of the power of the West, so Genghis Khan symbolizes the rise and predominance of the East. The importance of Genghis Khan as the symbol of the victorious East could explain why Genghis Khan has become a beloved figure even for those countries that themselves were devastated by the hordes of

Mongolian warriors of the Great Khan and his successors. This, for example, was the case for Japan, which, while one of the leading economic powers of the East, only barely escaped the invasions of Mongolian armies. The same could be said, to a certain degree, about Russia and other Asian countries of the former Soviet Union.

At the same time, the interest in Genghis Khan and the response to movies about him also indicates another important aspect of post-Soviet life in the territory of the former USSR. It indicates that the ethnic Russian elite still regards itself as the leading force in the Federation and, possibly, the entire post-Soviet space, in the context of the traditional “Eurasianist” model. At the same time, the alternative vision of the past and the present among the Russian minorities shows that they challenge such a model.

IMPLICATIONS: Yuri Bagrov, the producer of *Mongol*, already being viewed by the Russian public, openly proclaimed in interviews that he was inspired by Lev Gumilev. Gumilev, the son of the celebrated Russian poet and critic Nikolai Gumilev and his, perhaps even more famous mother, the poetess Anna Andreevna Gorenko (pseudonym Anna Akhmatova), had a turbulent and tragic life. Not only was his father executed (in 1921) on charges of participating in an anti-Soviet plot, but also his mother, with whom he had a tense relationship, had been harassed by authorities. Gumilev also had spent some time in Stalin's camp.

Lev Gumilev was known by the general public only during the Gorbachev era, at the very end of his life, becoming a celebrity overnight. With reservations, Gumilev had followed the historical Eurasianists, who emerged in the 1920s among Russian émigrés and who believed that the Russian civilization was a unique blend of Slavic and Turkic/Mongolian people. In Gumilev's view, the Mongol Conquest was not actually a massive invasion but rather a foray quickly leading to healthy symbiosis. Finally, and this was especially important for Gumilev as well as other Eurasianists, the Mongols had been a people of complete religious tolerance, and, because of this, Russians came to prefer "Orthodox" as their national identity. In fact, if it had not been the Mongols but the "dog knights" who prevailed, Russia would have been completely Latinized; Russia, converted to Roman Catholicism, would have disappeared entirely. Naturally, the Mongols here are seen as a mostly benign force. And in this reading there was actually no Mongol/Tatar yoke.

In the course of time, in this view, the Mongol Empire experienced a sort of decay, and the Mongols finally handed the imperial torch to the Russians. In fact, in the context of this theory, the Russian empire was nothing but an Orthodox-Mongol empire of a sort. Finally, the torch was passed to the USSR. Inspired by this vision of the Mongol empire, the producer of the movie not only made direct reference to Gumilev as an inspirational force, but also made several additional comments in an interview that should explain to his viewers why he chose Genghis Khan, and why the Mongol ruler's successor empire should be dear to each Russian. He stated that ethnic Russians should understand that Mongol/Tatar blood is in their veins and, implicitly, no pure "Russian blood" exists. Secondly, the movie's producer made reference to Alexander Nevsky, the Russian prince who defeated the Teutonic knights – the real mortal threat for Russia – at the Battle of Ice (1242) and who became a sort of quasi-brother to the Mongol/Tatar ruler Batu, who conquered Russia. He also reaffirmed the other cardinal premise of Gumilev's philosophy that without the Mongols, the Russians would have been assimilated by the West, religiously, culturally and ethnically. The

Mongolian conquest is seen not so much as conquest but as a sort of symbiosis of brotherly people; and this is in absolute congruence with Gumilev's vision of the Mongol/Tatar invasion.

Thus, the interest in Genghis Khan – as the producer insisted – is due not just to the dramatic aspect of the events and even the role of Asia in the future (here, he pointed to China's rise) but also to the fact that the Mongols had laid the foundation of the Russian state as a multi-cultural and multi-confessional state. Finally, there was another hint why Genghis Khan could be of interest and appreciation to present-day Russians. The movie started with the beginning of Genghis Khan, when he and those close to him fell in the abyss of ignominy. The young Genghis Khan was captured and enslaved, and his beautiful wife was raped. He seemed to be destined to absolute obscurity. Still, he rose literally from the ashes; and by the end of his life and his successors' lives, the Mongols controlled the biggest land mass empire in human history. The same, as implied by Bagrov, one could see as Russia's future. From the collapse of the USSR, Russia today is rising to be once again a major force in Eurasia.

And last but not least, in the cold, calculating figure of Genghis Khan, who meticulously and dispassionately built a great future for himself and his people, one could discern the future of none but Vladimir Putin, who, starting his career as an obscure KGB operative in post-Soviet Russia before the collapse of the regime, became a person with almost autocratic power and sees himself as the builder of the mighty Russia.

This image of Genghis Khan and his Mongol Empire, while pleasing to some in the Russian elite, has not fit well the political designs of others. One such group is the non-Slavic minorities of the Russian Federation. Indeed, Eurasianism in its traditional interpretation approaches the ethnic minorities with due respect and even recognizes that the present-day Russians are not pure Slavs, at least from a racial or ethnic point of view. Still, these political designs imply that it is the Russians to play the role of "elder brothers" in Russia and Eurasia; and it is to them that Genghis Khan and his successors passed the imperial torch. These plans are hardly pleasing to the numerous ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation, each with its own

ideological and, consequently, political and socio-economic construction. Some members of the elite believe that ethnic Russians should not just abandon the notion of “elder brothers” but themselves be relegated to the position of “younger brothers.” Some even believe that Russians are pretty much irrelevant to Eurasian space; consequently, they provide their own vision of the past.

A producers in Yakutia, an ethnic Yakut, had offered a new vision of Genghis Khan in his own movie. The movie acknowledges that Russia is the legitimate successor of the empire of Genghis Khan. Still, Russia rather plays a role of “younger brother.” Genghis Khan’s empire in this interpretation was predominately a Turkic state, and the Turkic people did not pass the torch to Russians. They dominated the Eurasian space in the past and dominate it in the present; and Yakuts, who are presented here as a Turkic people, should belong to the rulers of Eurasia/Russia.

The correspondent from *Izvestia* who visited Yakutia and interviewed the creator of the movie stated that this vision of the Yakut as the leading force of Russia/Eurasia is not an abstraction: it relates to the rising tide of Yakut nationalism and the abysmal conditions of ethnic Russians in Yakutia. In fact, all good jobs in present-day Yakutia are in the hands of ethnic Yakuts with Russians discriminated against in regard to both jobs and educational opportunities. The article “Genghis Khan, Show Your Face” led to a strong response that accused not only the author of the article but also *Izvestia* of fomenting ethnic tensions.

Most important in these two conflicting images of Genghis Khan, the builder of, actually, a Russian

empire or a state of Turkic/Mongolian people – minorities in today’s Russia – is the response of average citizens of the Russian Federation. And this response indicates deep-seated ethnic, or, to be precise, socio-ethnic tensions in the state. The response to the Yakutia-made movie is especially important from this perspective, for it could easily be traced by the Internet polemics related to the movies.

CONCLUSIONS: This interest in the Mongol empire indicates a global shift to Asia, which looms more and more as an economic and potentially geopolitical center of the globe. In the former USSR, this image of the Mongol empire had an additional dimension: it indicated the conflict of the various parts of the former USSR for the dominant position in the post-Soviet space. In the Russian Federation, the Mongol image is inherent in the conflicts between ethnic Russians and minorities. And the conflict is related to the different constructions of the images of the Mongol Empire. In one, the imperial torch was passed to the Russians. In the other vision, it was passed to Russia’s ethnic minorities – or to no one. Recent ethnic violence in Russia, such as in Kondopoga and Stavropol, illustrate that these different visions of the relationship between ethnic Russians and minorities are not just related to different visions of the past but have potentially serious implications for the fate of the Russian Federation.

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KABARDINO-BALKARIA: KANOKOV EQUIVOCATES, WHILE THREATS TO HIS REGIME MOUNT

Kevin Daniel Leahy

When Arsen Kanokov arrived in his native Kabardino-Balkaria to assume the presidency in September 2005 he exuded freshness and vigor. His appointment came amid much fanfare, with federal officials touting the wealthy businessman as the ideal person to kick-start the North Caucasian republic's torpid economy. In the two years that have followed, however, Kanokov has not managed to affect any economic reforms of real substance. Moreover, he has presided over an increase in militant activity throughout the republic, most spectacularly illustrated by the October 2005 attack on Nalchik by local forces loyal to the late Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basaev.

BACKGROUND: Although principally in favor of privatization, Kanokov has found the land question a thorny issue to deal with. His predecessor, Valeri Kokov, preferred to keep the issue of property ownership rights in a state of limbo, whereby property of any value remained in state hands. Kokov understood the complexities of the land question in Kabardino-Balkaria. The republic's minorities, in particular the Balkars, were apprehensive lest a privatization program, possibly in conjunction with an attempt at local government reform, would deprive them of their ancestral lands. The Balkars, who make up approximately 10% of Kabardino-Balkaria's population, mostly dwell in the mountainous south-western region of the republic. Balkars recall their 1943 deportation to Siberia at the behest of Stalin with understandable bitterness.

Although covetous of prime Balkar-held real estate, particularly in the potentially lucrative Elbrus region, Kokov, a Kabardin by birth, was reluctant to reassess property relations in any way. Balkar nationalism was a force to be reckoned with in the early nineties and Kokov was perhaps apprehensive lest such an initiative might inflame popular Balkar opinion. Generally, Kokov was quite happy with the way property was distributed in Kabardino-Balkaria. The most lucrative properties were controlled, if not officially owned, by his associates

and in 2004 the republic's parliament passed a law which prohibited the privatization of land for a period of 49 years.



Kanokov did not decry this prohibition directly, choosing instead to speak about the gradual and partial transfer of land into private ownership. Unlike his predecessor, however, he did openly criticize the distribution of property in the Elbrus region. But for all of Kanokov's pro-privatization rhetoric he soon realized that the most lucrative state properties were in the grasp of Kokov's allies, many of whom still retain considerable influence in the republic. Perhaps this is why Kanokov has affected a subtle shift in rhetorical emphasis from

promoting privatization to attracting outside investment. Backed by his patron in Russia's federal hierarchy, the recently appointed minister for regional development, Dmitri Kozak, Kanokov has consistently talked up the opportunities for investors in Kabardino-Balkaria. Specifically, he has touted for investors willing to fund the construction of a hydro-electric plant in Sarmakovo, intimating that a 75% controlling share in the enterprise would remain with the investor(s) upon completion of the project.

Kanokov's government has also courted investors interested in developing the fledgling tourist infrastructure in the Elbrus region, a proto-industry long regarded as Kabardino-Balkaria's golden goose. Kanokov ardently believes that heavy financial investment in such projects can help remedy the republic's well-documented socio-economic ills. Poor wages and unemployment, he argues, were to blame for the rebel attack on Nalchik in 2005.

IMPLICATIONS: While Kanokov did not personally sow the seeds of militancy in Kabardino-Balkaria, he has done little to spoil its harvest. By embracing an exclusively economic rationale for the increased assertiveness of Kabardino-Balkaria's rebel movement, Kanokov has only partially identified the underlying causes of this trend. As was pointed out shortly after the attack on Nalchik, many of the assailants were from rather well-to-do families and, therefore, could not have been motivated by economic grievances.

It should also be noted that the attacking force was heterogeneous in its composition with near-equal numbers of Kabardins and Balkars participating. Ironically, although the raid itself went off at half-cock and was suppressed by state law-enforcement agencies with relative ease, its socio-political fallout has since gathered a momentum of its own and continues to bedevil relations between Kabardino-Balkaria's authorities and large sections of society. The authorities' refusal to return the militants' bodies for burial has become an extremely controversial issue. Despite publicly undertaking to facilitate the return of the rebels' bodies, Kanokov has thus far entirely failed to do so. Kanokov's

inaction on this matter indicates his weakness in the face of the republic's power ministries, in particular the local interior ministry (MVD) which remains in the grasp of Kokov-era functionaries.

In his haste to blame economic grievances for inciting the Nalchik raid, Kanokov exhibited a somewhat constricted interpretation of local grass-roots realities. He did, however, acknowledge the fact that the heavy-handed antics of the local MVD were in part responsible for the growing anti-state attitude among local adherents of non-official Islam. One of Kanokov's first acts as president was to reopen a number of mosques which had been closed by his predecessor. Shamil Basaev would later acknowledge this gesture, claiming that it had minded him to spare Kanokov's life while planning the 2005 Nalchik blitz.

Kanokov won additional credit with Basaev's constituents by conspiring to have Hachim Shogenov removed from his position as interior minister. Shogenov was complicit in the severe police repression directed against perceived extremists during the latter part of Kokov's tenure. Many blamed Shogenov's heavy-handed tactics for precipitating the Nalchik raid and saw it as a case of the chickens coming home to roost. But no sooner had Shogenov been dismissed as MVD chief than he was invited back into the authorities' fold as an advisor to Kanokov. This reprieve suggests that Shogenov's dismissal was less for his inept performance as police chief than it was an attempt to garner good PR for the president.

CONCLUSIONS: It would appear that Arsen Kanokov has no well-thought-out strategy for dealing with the causes of instability in Kabardino-Balkaria. Although pro-privatization in principle, Kanokov has shied away from implementing a republic-wide program of privatization lest he upset veiled, but well entrenched, clan interests. In addition, his efforts to attract inward investment to Kabardino-Balkaria have proven futile, mainly because potential investors are scared off by the growing operational strength of the republic's militant constituency. The militants themselves are fully cognizant of this and have directly threatened

potential investors. Last year, speaking of local businessmen, a well-known local militant warned: “We will keep a close eye on them and see who are real Muslims and who only pretend to be such”. The short-term political gain accrued by Kanokov through popular initiatives like the reopening of mosques and the dismissals of despised police officials, has been offset by his tendency to needlessly create political problems for himself. For example, his recent decision to stage celebrations marking the 450th anniversary of Kabardino-Balkaria’s “voluntary incorporation” into the Russian Empire – a deeply divisive point of historical contentiousness among militants and ordinary citizens alike – was bewildering. Add to this his insensitive handling of the republic’s Balkar

minority and his continuing appeasement of corrupt Kokov-era apparatchiks who wield de facto control over most of the republic’s economy. Crucially, his failure to secure the return of the Nalchik militants’ remains has negated the positive impression made by initial gestures of magnanimity on his part. Kanokov gives the impression of a man who is not on top of his brief, someone who is reacting to, rather than directing, the political course of events in the republic. Until such time as he can reverse this dynamic, Kanokov has little chance of improving the socio-political fortunes of this troubled locale.

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New issue of the

China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly

The August 2007 issue of the China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly, edited by Dr. Niklas Swanström, is online.

The issue contains articles by Johannes Linn, Alyson Bailes, Robert O. Freedman, Magnus Norell, and Marlene Laruelle, among other.

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

KAZAKHSTAN CLAIMS POLITICAL ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Farkhad Sharip

Nursultan Nazarbayev accentuated common religious values and historical cultural ties during his three-day visit to Syria and, more clearly than ever before, emphasized the increasingly pro-Arab stance of Astana in the Middle East conflict. He spoke out for the return of the Golan Heights to Syria and backed the ‘legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to defend their interests’. Nazarbayev’s activism indicates Kazakhstan’s wish to play a role as an independent actor both inside and outside Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: Following the visit, government media in Kazakhstan emphasized the “the exceptionally warm and friendly atmosphere” of talks between Nursultan Nazarbayev and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. It was one of the most extended visits Nazarbayev ever paid to an Arab state. He arrived in Damascus on November 5 and spent three days in intensive talks.



In the present state of bilateral relations, there is little reason to list Syria among Kazakhstan’s important economic and trade partners in the Middle East. By any standards, Syria, beset by chronic economic and political troubles in the tinderbox region is not a model partner for

Kazakhstan. In 2006, the trade volume between Syria and Kazakhstan barely made up \$17 million (of this, \$16 million owing to exports from Kazakhstan), a ridiculous figure compared to the \$2 billion trade turnover with Iran. Although bilateral trade increased slightly this year to reach \$19.5 million, with meager Syrian export items – construction materials, textiles and cotton –

progress in business relations is slow. But Kazakhstan sees considerable investment opportunities in Syrian oil and gas development projects. Kazakhstan in fact weighs the possibility of financing the planned construction of a Syrian gas pipeline.

Most importantly, Kazakhstan regards geographically well-situated Syria as an important gateway to Arab energy markets. The serious impediment in Kazakhstan’s

drive is the volatile political situation and complex relations of Arab nations with the United States and Israel. So far, Kazakh diplomats conspicuously avoided any political assessment of Arab-Israeli confrontation. But verbal support for the Syrian stance in the Middle East is what was expected by

Damascus from Astana during Nazarbayev's visit. The Kazakh President did not go beyond praising bilateral "friendly relations", but at a press conference in Damascus he elaborated on the Syrian-Israeli conflict and spoke of the "necessity" for Israel to return the occupied Golan Heights to Syria. He also expressed support for the Palestinians, adding in the next breath that "Israel has the right to live in peace and security along with all other states in the region".

On the sidelines of Nazarbayev's visit to Damascus, the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) quoted the non-resident Kazakh Ambassador, Baghdat Amreyev, as backing Damascus' official line in its long-standing confrontation with Israel. Amreyev allegedly said in his interview with the Syrian newspaper Al-Baath that "no peace in the Middle East could be established without the return of the land to its owners and the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace". He added that Kazakhstan "affirmed the need for the restoration of all usurped Arab rights and liberation all occupied Arab lands. He asserted his country's support to the exerted efforts to achieve peace and security in the region, particularly the Syrian efforts, calling on western countries, the EU and U.S. to contribute to peacekeeping".

IMPLICATIONS: There are many reasons to believe that the Kazakh leader picked up this unusual tone in his Middle East discourse not just to please his Syrian counterpart or out of brotherly sentiments for Muslims in the Arab world. In fact, Kazakhstan seeks a more vocal and independent policy in the Middle East. In Damascus, Nazarbayev made known his government's intention to open a Kazakh embassy in Syria, and called on Arab countries to join the Meeting on Interaction and Trust Building in Asia initiative launched by Astana. He also attached great importance to the Organization of the Islamic Conference as a political tool in solving the Middle East conflict. The Foreign Ministries of Syria and Kazakhstan signed agreements on conducting political consultations.

President Nazarbayev received unequivocal support for his interaction and trust building initiative in the United Arab Emirates, the next stop on his Arab tour. However, the most substantial part of his talks with Sheikh Khalif ben Zaid Nahaiya was the pledge on the part of Abu Dhabi to pour more investment money into Kazakhstan's oil sector. Sheikh Khalif ben Zaid reaffirmed his country's plans to finance the construction of gas processing plants and petrochemical industry in Kazakhstan. A government delegation is expected to visit Kazakhstan to finalize investment projects. The Abu Dhabi Development Fund has already channeled billions of dollars for the construction and development of Kazakhstan's new capital, Astana. Kazakhstan also profits from shared religious values. The Emirate has already earmarked \$3 million for the construction of a grandiose mosque in South Kazakhstan.

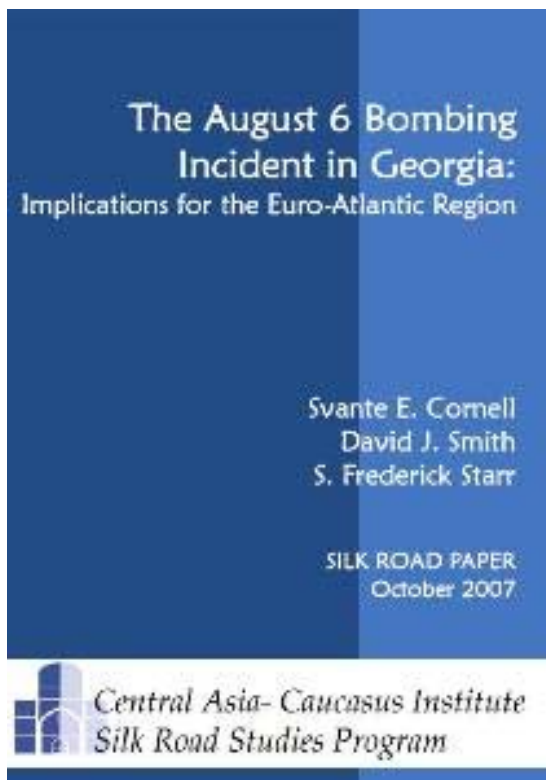
Many factors contribute to the acceleration of Kazakh-Arab rapprochement. Astana, growing weary of having to constantly jockey for western investments dependent on democratic prerequisites, is eyeing Arab coffers. Secondly, the intensifying clash of interests between China and Russia in the Caspian region on the one hand, and growing differences within the Russian-orchestrated Eurasian Economic Community on the other, increases the feeling of uncertainty in Astana. At the recent meeting of the Eurasian Economic Community in Almaty, Russian transport minister Igor Levitin practically dashed Kazakhstan's hopes for a narrow-gauge railway line running from China through Kazakhstan to Iran and Turkey, discarding this project as "premature". Astana is also likely to face renewed pressure from Moscow for its recent option for the American-favored project of a Caspian seabed gas pipeline in alliance with Azerbaijan.

CONCLUSIONS: Kazakhstan clearly benefits from expanding contacts with Arab countries economically and politically. Persian Gulf states are potentially efficient hydrocarbon markets and perfectly square with Kazakhstan's plans for diversification of its energy export routes. Until

recently, Kazakhstan, with eyes on the mounting tension between the West and Arab nations, limited its diplomatic efforts in the Middle East to tentative steps towards consolidating relations with Arab countries predominantly in cultural and spiritual areas. During his last visit to Syria, Nazarbayev effectively used cultural factors pledging \$4.6 million for the construction of the Abu Nasr al-Farabi mausoleum, and the reconstruction of the memorial site dedicated to Sultan Beybars (it is widely believed in Kazakhstan that both prominent historical figures in Arab history have Kazakh roots). Simultaneously, Kazakhstan is shifting the

accent on active economic and political cooperation with Arab nations. It remains to be seen whether Kazakh diplomacy will go far enough in ensuring a more independent economic and political role of Kazakhstan in the Arab world, but in any case, in the short term at least, Kazakhstan's progress in this direction will remain largely dependent on western sway in the region.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Farkhad Sharip is an Astana-based freelance writer.



New Silk Road Paper:

***The August 6 Bombing Incident in Georgia:
Implications for the Euro-Atlantic Region***

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OSCE MAINTAINS ROLE IN CENTRAL ASIA DESPITE CONFLICT WITH RUSSIA

Richard Weitz

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is engaged in a bitter battle with Moscow. The OSCE has already abandoned its efforts to monitor the Duma elections in December and is struggling to obtain Russian permission to observe the March 2008 presidential elections. In addition, Moscow is trying to mobilize its allies to pressure the OSCE to sharply curtail its election monitoring program in the former Soviet republics. Despite its deteriorating relations with Russia, the OSCE continues to pursue an active reform agenda in Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: The Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) organizes observation teams to monitor elections in OSCE member states. It can employ hundreds of people, both local residents as well as foreigners, on long- and short-term missions. For several years, ODIHR monitors have complained about numerous problems in the elections conducted in the former Soviet republics.

In response, the governments of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)—a Moscow-led military and political alliance that includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as well as Russia—have countered with a barrage of criticisms aimed at the OSCE. First, they protest that the OSCE has become excessively preoccupied with democracy and human rights in their countries, to the neglect of enhancing their security and economic development. In addition, they charge that some OSCE bodies enjoy unwarranted autonomy from the member governments. CSTO representatives insist that collective intergovernmental bodies should strictly control the OSCE bureaucracy. They also regularly complain of bias and inefficient management (especially wasted financial resources) within the OSCE bureaucracy.

Another primarily Russian grievance is that the OSCE is excessively accommodating to nongovernmental organizations that oppose the policies of the Putin administration. As part of their

commitment to democracy promotion, OSCE bodies try to solicit the perspectives of citizen groups as well as governments. Russian authorities fear this process unduly empowers their opponents. The Russian delegation walked out when representatives of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, which is banned in the Russian Federation but not in some European countries, spoke at the September 2007 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw

Russian officials also depict the OSCE as having fallen under the control of Washington and its allies. For example, in his comments to foreign reporters following ODIHR's decision not to send observers to the December 2007 Duma elections, Vladimir Churov, chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC), indicated that Moscow believes that the OSCE has become a tool of U.S. foreign policy: "If Washington controls ODIHR they should say it openly: 'Yes, we control ODIHR, we finance it and we decide where it goes and where it does not.'" President Putin himself in late November accused Washington of being behind the decision, adding this would affect bilateral relations.

In September 2007, CSTO member governments circulated a series of proposed measures at the OSCE's headquarters in Vienna whose combined effect, if adopted, would considerably weaken the ODIHR's ability to monitor elections in the former Soviet republics. The plans would reduce the size of the OSCE election missions to 50 or fewer people

and limit the number of monitors from any one country to under five percent of that total. In addition, the observers could not make public assessments of the vote until after government bodies had announced the official results. Since government representatives would suffer under no such prohibition, the incumbent authorities would be able to use the media, which has fallen under state control in many of the CSTO countries, to characterize the elections as they wished without much competition. The publication of the OSCE mission's final report would require the approval of all 55 OSCE members, effectively giving any government veto rights. Churov subsequently warned that Russia might not invite OSCE observers to monitor its March 2 presidential elections unless the OSCE adopted Russia's proposals at the meeting of the OSCE Foreign Ministers Council, its governing body, scheduled to occur on November 29 in Madrid.

Although the CSTO members have not yet secured the support of the other OSCE members for these proposals, they can impose some of them unilaterally by establishing stringent standards for foreign observers of their national elections. Russia has already provided an example of this tactic regarding its December 2007 Duma elections. This year, the Russian authorities waited much longer than previously before inviting the OSCE observers. They also refused to invite the traditional advanced assessment team, which would have determined what kind of mission Russia would have needed.

When the Russian government finally issued the invitation on October 30, it severely reduced the permissible number of OSCE monitors. Arguing that the limited resources available to Russia's Central Electoral Commission required it to limit the total number of government-accredited foreign observers to 400, Churov indicated that 70 OHDIR observers could oversee the Duma ballot. After further delays in securing visas, ODIHR concluded they lacked adequate preparation time to effectively carry out their mission and decided to cancel the entire visit.

IMPLICATIONS: It now remains to be seen whether the other CSTO members will adopt similar tactics. Thus far, the Central Asian states continue to cooperate with the OSCE despite its escalating dispute with Moscow.

For example, from September 20-22, 2007, the OSCE Center in Astana organized a three-day meeting of representatives from the public water authorities, other government agencies, and the private sectors of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to discuss deepening bilateral cooperation on joint water management. In particular, they considered creating a joint Transboundary River Basin Council for the Chu and Talas River. The council would serve as a venue for addressing commercial, environmental and other issues of interest to all stakeholders.

Like many OSCE economic development activities, the Kazakh-Kyrgyz water project also aims to enhance political relations among the participating countries, both by reducing a possible source of conflict and by encouraging the states to collaborate on mutually beneficial activities. Barataly Koshmatov, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Water Resources, observed that, "Proper management and joint share of natural water wealth helps build solid ground for political co-operation and serves as a good example of collaboration and enhancing in the use of transboundary water resources in the Central Asian region."

At the same time that OHDIR's ties with Moscow were deteriorating, the Kazakh government hosted a visiting OSCE delegation, headed by OHDIR director Christian Strohal, in early November. The two parties affirmed their commitment to cooperate on democracy and human rights issues despite the OSCE's concerns that Kazakhstan's August 2007 legislative elections, while demonstrating progress compared with previous ballots, failed to meet certain international standards.

Kazakhstani officials' continued interest in collaborating with the OSCE presumably reflects their desire to assume the OSCE's rotating chairmanship in 2009. A few weeks later, however, Kyrgyzstan allowed ODIHR to begin its election

observation mission for its December 16 parliamentary elections on November 24. The authorities also permitted the OSCE to send its standard advanced assessment mission, which determined the number of observers needed and other issues related to the monitoring effort, on November 5-6.

Most recently, on November 20, 2007, ODIHR and the OSCE Center in Ashgabat organized, with the approval of Turkmenistan's government, a two-day seminar on domestic election observation for over 70 representatives from the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, the Women's Union, the Youth Organization and the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights.

CONCLUSIONS: Although the expansion of NATO and the EU has led to a decrease of the OSCE's influence in most of Europe, the organization remains important in Central Asian countries since these states have little chance of gaining entry into the two Euro-Atlantic institutions. In addition, while Central Asian governments disapprove of the OSCE's stress on improving their respect for human rights and

insistence on reforming their other domestic policies, the EU and NATO are making similar demands. The OSCE's continuing attractiveness is seen in the Kazakh government's determined drive to become OSCE chair in 2009.

The OSCE faces more serious competition from the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In October 2002, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) heads of states established their own CIS Election Monitoring Organization. Its members have regularly endorsed almost every election that has occurred in a member country since that time, even when the elections have been deemed unfair by OSCE observers. The CIS will deploy approximately one hundred observers to monitor Russia's December 2007 Duma elections. The SCO has also developed its own election monitors. They too will send observers to the Duma election and, presumably, give the ballot their blessing as well.

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FIELD REPORTS

PROBLEMATIC THRESHOLD ANGERS POLITICAL PARTIES IN KYRGYZSTAN

Nurshat Ababakirov

The new Kyrgyz Electoral Code, which was passed a month ago in a contentious referendum that ended in President Kurmanbek Bakiev's favor, has become a source of new tensions between the government and the opposition. Unlike its initial meaning understood by public, the Central Election Committee (CEC) increased the election threshold. The new rules may leave even larger parties quite vulnerable, who could mount a decent opposition to the pro-presidential party, Ak Zhol.

According to the CEC's official interpretation of the law on November 19, every party has to secure in every province at least 0.5 percent of all the eligible voters in the country. Thus every party must at least earn 13,500 votes, despite the dramatically varying number of population in the seven provinces and two largest cities, Bishkek and Osh. The barrier gets significantly high in the provinces with small population size. In Talas and Naryn oblasts and in Osh city, it reaches around 10 percent.

Omurbek Tekebaev, the leader of the strongest opposition party, Atameken, maintains a rather skeptical view. He warns that this government's restrictive measure, aimed to prevent competition and to hinder the opposition parties from entering

the parliament, may result in the failure of the elections by actually letting no party in. "Such a prospect is dangerous, since new parliamentary elections will only be held in spring 2008," Tekebaev asserts. He also criticizes it for distorting the system of proportional representation, pointing to the possibility of many votes getting wasted in one province due to failure to secure enough votes in the other, spurring, in worst case, "interregional and interethnic tensions" in the country. In general, about a dozen parties, including Atameken, Asaba, Ar Namys, and Social Democrats called it a "draconian" measure.

During the October 21 referendum, the 0.5% restrictive threshold hardly attracted public attention, since it was called a 'regional' barrier and came along with another five percent threshold applied nationwide. On top of that, such seemingly minor-looking details were heavily overshadowed by discussions on the draft constitution, generally considered authoritarian, that Bakiev was pressing on; the unprecedented prospect of proportional representation in the legislative branch; and the expected dissolution of the parliament formed by former President Askar Akaev in 2005.

However, no sooner did the contentious referendum pass in favor of Bakiev's drafts with the dissolution of the parliament the following day, than the parties began to deliberate on the terms of the newly adopted party-list elections. According to Naryn Aiyp, a political expert, "the government was lured to increase the threshold, when the parties themselves showed a lack of tenacity over the ambiguous wording of the clause." The task was also assisted by the absence of the parliament and the idleness of the Constitutional Court, whose chairwomen, Cholpon Baekova, herself is in the top-five-list of Ak Zhol's candidates. Quite controversially, Adahan Madumarov, the former state secretary and a leading member of Ak Zhol, thinks the barrier is "not a tragedy", since, in his view, it will bring out parties that have a nationwide appeal.

President Bakiev, in turn, remains reluctant to take any steps by ignoring the requests of dozen of political parties to invalidate the allegedly illegal decision of the CEC to revise the threshold.

An ardent member of the opposition, Kubatbek Baybolov, who merged his Ak Shumkak party with the Atameken party led by Omurbek Tekebaev, is certain that President Bakiyev will not change his mind, explaining it by the lack of sufficient

confidence that his party will enjoy a plurality of the vote. "Although Atameken party is can easily pass this threshold, it is generally wrong [to change norms after the referendum]," stated Baybolov.

In general, there is widespread doubt that the elections will be fair and transparent, and that substantial numbers of seats will be given to opposition parties. This is especially the case following the controversial referendum, which earned criticism from the OSCE and the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek. Bakiyev's drafts were universally supported with an official turnout of about 80 per cent, while independent observers detected rampant ballot falsification, and stressed that only 30 per cent of voters attended the referendum.

However, as a new rule, the CEC allowed political parties, whose number dropped from 22 to 12 during the registration process, to delegate representatives to the electoral precincts in every province, which should ensure a minimum of administrative involvement. With about 2,500 voting districts and an enormous number of government employees willing to please their managers, the dozen of political parties will need to invest considerable efforts and coordination for the sake of fair elections.

ASHGABAT HOSTS SUMMIT OF CIS PRIME MINISTERS

Chemen Durdiyeva

On November 22, the heads of government of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member states gathered in Ashgabat to hold a summit. Although no major official agreements came out of the talks, the summit overall was proclaimed to be successful, considering Turkmenistan's increasing participation in the

Commonwealth. The agenda of the meeting touched upon a variety of internal and regional issues, however wide-scope Russian-Turkmen bilateral talks following the summit appeared to have overshadowed the domestic implications and political significance of the summit for Turkmenistan.

The Ashgabat summit is in fact a continuation of the previous gathering of the CIS Council that took place on October 5, 2007, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Though an associated member of the CIS, Turkmenistan has increased its participation in the group's forums under Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov's administration. In this connection, it is the first time that Ashgabat is hosting the CIS summit in nearly 15 years. This time, the heads of government of the member states held talks for more than three hours behind closed doors, and no specific details were revealed at a subsequent press conference. In the words of Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, 25 specific issues were laid out for talks, the top priority being the objective of enhancing economic cooperation within the member states. Also, it was reported that the heads of government adopted a CIS budget for 2008, and a council on border cooperation was set up.

Sergei Lebedev, organizer of the summit and the new Secretary of the Executive Commission of the CIS Council, asserted that the Ashgabat summit, along with Turkmenistan's increasing participation in similar forums, facilitates further integration of CIS countries. For his part, President Berdimuhammedov assured the participants of the summit that Turkmenistan will pursue an "Open Doors" policy in its foreign relations with CIS countries. To attract more foreign direct investment in Turkmenistan's ongoing economic reforms and strengthen a regional cooperation on issues including the country's strategic energy sector, the president said that the country is open for companies of CIS countries as well. Berdimuhammedov further expressed his wish to make Turkmenistan a center for holding similar regional and international summits, economic forums and cultural festivities.

On the day following the summit, a Russian delegation headed by the recently appointed Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov held bilateral talks with Turkmen authorities covering a wide range of issues. The delegation from the Russian side included government officials as well as the

representatives of major oil, gas and service companies such as LukOil, Gazprom, and Kamaz. Zubkov noted that Turkmenistan is Russia's strategic energy partner and that Russia is willing to put every effort on its part to boost cooperation in this sector. It is noteworthy that Turkmenistan and Russia struck a deal in May of this year on building a new Caspian-coast gas pipeline to Russia, which is expected to boost almost twofold the current 50 bcm of gas exports from Turkmenistan to Russia. Russia's investment and involvement in the Turkmen economy have increased especially after Berdimuhammedov's visit to Moscow earlier this year. Reportedly, some 82 firms with Russian capital, 50 of which are officially registered companies, are currently working in Turkmenistan. Within this context, 114 projects worth \$US 284 million are presently being implemented by Russian firms in Turkmenistan.

During the recent bilateral meeting, the sides agreed on opening a Turkmen Chamber of Commerce or a trade center in Moscow, representing the major commodities and trade ties of Turkmenistan with Russian Federation. To further discuss these issues and promoting Russia's new business opportunities in Turkmenistan, a two-day Russian-Turkmen business forum will take place in Ashgabat on December 4-5, 2007.

In addition to talks over exploring the country's rich hydrocarbon resources, the sides also agreed on attracting Russian companies to producing alternative energy sources in Turkmenistan. In this connection, since the sun shines almost the entire year in Turkmenistan, producing solar and wind energy is taking a lead as a new growing sector in the country. It is noteworthy that certain European companies such as ENEX Process Engineering have already started construction of a solar and wind energy plant in Turkmenistan.

Within the framework of talks on increasing Russia's investment in Turkmenistan's energy sector, Prime Minister Zubkov also agreed on helping to prepare national cadres in this sector as well. Specifically, the number of Turkmen students studying in Russia's prestigious universities in the

gas and oil sector will be increased from 170 to 320 starting from next year.

Thus, in the process of Turkmenistan's political and economic opening to the world, the CIS summit in Ashgabat became another major event in Turkmenistan. Considering Turkmenistan's need and willingness to reach out to new trade routes to Europe and South Asia for its energy resources, it is

most likely that the country will enhance politico-economic cooperation within the Commonwealth. That said, Viktor Zubkov's wide-scale state visit to Ashgabat on the summit's occasion became another step to reinforce Russia's participation in the country's energy sector.

DEVELOPMENT AND LIBERALIZATION OF BANKING SYSTEM IN UZBEKISTAN

Erkin Ahmadov

On November 7, 2007, the Uzbek President signed a decree "On Measures of Further Development of the Banking System and Banking Investment". The decree outlined the measures to be taken for the reformation and liberalization of Uzbekistan's banking system, to increase the capacity for competition, financial stability and investment activity of commercial banks, and to decrease non-bank circulations and cashless settlements. It was introduced in the framework of a special program for deepening, reforming and developing the banking system of the country for 2007-2010.

One of the measures provided in the enactment states that from the beginning of the upcoming year, all newly established banks must have their nominal capital in Euros, not in U.S. dollars as used to be the case. From January 1, 2008, the size of nominal capital for newly established banks will be 5 million Euros for commercial banks, and 2,5 million Euros for private banks. These rates were introduced in the beginning of 2007, marking an increase in nominal capital requirements, but it was in U.S. dollars at the time.

As for operating banks, the Central Bank of Uzbekistan is to conduct all the necessary procedures for them to comply with requirements in

2008. Currently there are 28 banks in Uzbekistan, including three state-owned and five with foreign capital.

The decision to change the currency that defines the size of nominal capital may be interpreted as a deliberate step on behalf of the government. With the current drop in the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar, the difference in the exchange rate will dictate a minimum of 40 percent increase in the equivalent amount in Uzbek Sums necessary to establish a new commercial bank. The Euro is already reaching an exchange rate of 1,48 to the dollar.

Perhaps attempting to justify the increase of fund needed to set up a bank, in the very same enactment there are measures to allow commercial banks that have a license for engaging in banking activity to conduct professional activity on the securities markets as investment intermediaries, administrators of investment assets, and investment consultants. The Central Bank expects aggregate shareholder investment to increase by 16 percent during January-September 2008.

Another part of the decree is concerned with the issue of widening the net of banking establishments, specifically emphasizing the presence of such

institutions in the area of agricultural markets. The arrangements for the realization of the provision include the opening of mini-banks, special cash offices, and points of currency exchange. In addition, agricultural households, trade firms and other entities of small business and private entrepreneurship shall be provided with credits, micro-financing services, and the possibility of insuring themselves against risks connected with agricultural produce on agricultural markets.

Apparently there is a substantial concern with the flows of money that evade the state budget and go into free cash circulation. By establishing banks (in any form proposed) at markets and offering farmers services that may presumably improve their situation, the government is attempting to replenish state resources by attracting money from the markets, which usually circulate in cash and is therefore not subject to taxation.

As is often the case, the text of the law does not comply with its name and its purpose. Looking at the content of the decree, it is unclear whether it will have any positive effect on the development and liberalization of the state banking system, as is its stated intention. It is undoubtedly clear that starting from 2008, more money will be needed to establish a bank; while attractive services offered by banks will capture farmers' modest profits in the banking system. As such, the provisions of the decree have little to do with the liberalization of the banking system. The cashier plan, i.e. the submission of cash profits by private stores and merchandise to banks is still there, as well as the prohibition on engaging in commercial and other activities enforced by the Central Bank upon commercial banks.

FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TAJIK SUPREME COUNCIL CELEBRATED

Sergey Medrea

Tajikistan extensively celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the sixteenth session of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Tajikistan. The session being celebrated took place in November 1992 and became historically significant for the formation of a new government structure, filling the power vacuum and restoring constitutional order within the country. The national emblem, the flag and a project for a new Constitution were reviewed and developed throughout that celebrated session. Emomali Rahmon, known at the time as Rahmonov, was elected by a majority of 186 to 11 as the Chairman of the Supreme Council. The new government being in place, the Supreme Council commenced the pivotal work of stabilizing Tajikistan, then beyond the threshold of civil war.

Most local media broadcasted and commemorated the historical session by stressing Emomali Rahmon's nomination and his subsequent efforts and excellence in ending the fratricidal war. In the *Asia Plus* local newspaper, the president was portrayed as having been "gifted by God with good health, an analytical mind, humaneness and thus worldwide known as the Peacemaker President." Whereas government at the end of the civil war consisted of different confronting political groups and parties, today Rahmon has succeeded in tightening his power over the country's political life. The result of the most recent parliamentary and presidential elections showed that the president now has full control of the political process and that there are few limitations on his authority. In fact, every time elections or referenda are held, rumors

spread that if the people do not support the president or his party, the fragile peace might be somehow be destabilized.

Locals and guests in Dushanbe were served the traditional dish *plov* and other goods – for free, as well as free public concerts to celebrate the peace. Emomali Rahmon made a three-day official visit to the Soghd region in northern Tajikistan, where the historical session had taken place. He attended the official ceremony at Arbob palace and gave the main speech at the event. In the speech, Rahmon provided a historical account of the major events and significance of the sixteenth session, emphasizing the fact that the causes of the civil war had been complicated and claiming that “[the] tragedy of civil war was imposed by ill-wishes and enemies of Tajik nation upon it...who pursued the aim to divide [the] ancient Tajik nation.” The speech also outlined and summarized the major economic and political achievements of Tajikistan since the end of the war. The President concluded the speech by giving a number of serious instructions to local officials, dealing with the prospects of future work. He said the main objective of the government now was productive work towards the realization of “National Strategies of Development” and the “Strategy of Poverty Reduction”.

During his visit in Khujand, Rahmon opened the renovated and newly equipped regional cardiology center and the cement factory, and gifted thirty

ambulances to health institutions. On opening the cardiology center, he could not resist giving recommendations on the effective use of the new equipment and sharing his wisdom with medical specialists. He also visited a boarding school for children with disabilities, orphans, and low-income background. “The president’s visit to the boarding school is another demonstration of the president’s concern in questions of education...” commented *Asia Plus*.

The administration and local officials of the Soghd region had been several months in preparing for the presidential visit. On the upside, locals in Khujand, where the president spent most of his visit, had almost no limitations on electricity and gas; and also enjoyed the various positive transformations in terms of construction projects in the city that had been done before the visit. On the down side, the celebration was rather shattered by the fact that the main roads in Khujand were closed down for most of the three days, with people forced to conduct their daily routines on foot.

In Tajikistan, peace is highly regarded; people prefer to agree and go along with most governmental policies because of the fear of the sometimes unfounded threat of instability in the country. The extensive propaganda concerning the fabled sixteenth session, and Rahmon’s portrayal as a national “savior”, only help to reinforce the already unrestricted power and popularity of the President.

NEWS DIGEST

KAZAKH MINISTER CLAIMS NEW AGREEMENT REACHED WITH INDEPENDENT MEDIA

19 November

Kazakh Minister of Culture and Information Yermukhamet Yertysbaev said on November 16 that a new agreement was reached at a recent meeting with representatives from the country's non-state media. Yertysbaev explained that he had "a normal conversation" with "opposition" media officials, who he characterized as "sensible people," and agreed "to observe certain rules of the game and adhere to ethical norms." Some of the opposition media officials disputed the minister's claims, however, and the editors of the opposition "Respublika," "Taszhargan," and "Vzglyad" newspapers published an address to their readers describing the meeting as "an attempt to interfere in editorial policy." The opposition editors went on to stress that "no one - not even the information minister or the government or the parliament -- has the right to dictate to the independent press what it should publish." The head of Kazakhstan's Union of Journalists, Seitkazy Mataev, also dismissed the minister's claim of an agreement, adding that Yertysbaev was attempting to impose "censorship" by pressuring the media not to publish materials based on "audio recordings of telephone conversations of high-ranking Kazakh officials" recently posted on the Internet (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

FORMER ARMENIAN PRESIDENT APOLOGIZES FOR 'DISASTROUS' PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS

19 November

Speaking on November 16 to some 20,000 supporters at a rally in Yerevan, Levon Ter-Petrossian admitted to having made major errors during his tenure as president from 1991-1998, for which he expressed "belated but sincere" apologies, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Ter-Petrossian singled out as his gravest error of judgment having appointed two Armenians from the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Robert Kocharian and Serzh Sarkisian, to government positions in Yerevan. The two men were instrumental in forcing Ter-Petrossian to resign in February 1998, whereupon Kocharian was elected to succeed him. Sarkisian, now prime minister, is widely expected to win the presidential election on February 19, 2008, in which Kocharian is barred from seeking a third term. Ter-Petrossian has said he will run in the presidential election. He noted that Sarkisian, who on November 10 challenged Ter-Petrossian to "repent and apologize to the Armenian people" for his errors, never criticized the regime's policies prior to 1998. Ter-Petrossian also rejected out of hand claims by Kocharian that his leadership "ruined" the Armenian economy. He admitted that government corruption was a problem during his tenure as president, but argued that his leadership team, in contrast to Kocharian's, was not "criminal." Ter-Petrossian called on three potential rivals to back his presidential bid, including his main challenger in the 1996 presidential ballot, opposition National Democratic Union Chairman Vazgen Manukian, and he vowed that if elected, he would step down after three years and "leave the political arena for good." He appealed to the international community to monitor closely the preparations for and conduct of the February 2008 election,

claiming that the parliamentary ballot in May 2007 was marred by fraud "disguised with such ingenuity that no observer could detect" it. Ter-Petrosian further called for the immediate dismissal of Yerevan police chief Major General Nerses Nazarian, whom Ter-Petrosian's supporters identified as one of the police officers responsible for the beating the previous day of youth activist Narek Galstian. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT TO STEP DOWN ON NOVEMBER 20 – MINISTER

19 November

Georgian State Minister for Reform Kakha Bendukidze thinks that President Mikheil Saakashvili will be re-elected despite the latest events that seriously hurt the country's image. "There is no doubt the latest events damaged the reputation, political image and economic policy of Georgia. If anyone tries to pretend that nothing has happened, that is wrong. I am positive that this outcome was the goal pursued by the people who started the whole thing," Bendukidze said in an interview published in the Monday issue of the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*. "The European democratic tradition demands that the president step down and seek a new mandate. The president will resign on November 20, and new elections will take place," the minister said. (Interfax)

ARMENIAN PRIME MINISTER LAMBASTES ELECTION RIVAL

20 November

Serzh Sarkisian on November 19 responded to statements made by former President Levon Ter-Petrosian at a mass rally in Yerevan three days earlier, Noyan Tapan and RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Ter-Petrosian, who is considered Sarkisian's most formidable challenger in the presidential election scheduled for February 19, 2008, refuted in considerable detail earlier accusations by Sarkisian and incumbent President Robert Kocharian that his administration's economic policies "ruined" Armenia. Ter-Petrosian also appealed to opposition parties to back his presidential bid, and vowed that if he wins the February 2008 ballot, he will step down after three years. Commenting on that offer on November 19, Sarkisian said Ter-Petrosian

"probably thinks that three years is enough to surrender Karabakh." Major opposition parties reacted coolly to Ter-Petrosian's appeal for support, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported on November 19. To date, only his Armenian Pan-National Movement and the extra-parliamentary People's Party of Armenia headed by Stepan Demirchian have expressed support for his candidacy, together with some 10-12 smaller opposition groups. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN IS PLANNING TO JOIN NATO – DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

20 November

Deputy Prime Minister Yaqub Eyybov has said that Azerbaijan intends to join NATO. "We intend to integrate into NATO. We plan to join the alliance and we have an Individual Partnership Action Plan," Eyybov who also chairs the commission for Azerbaijan-NATO cooperation told the press on Tuesday. He said it is premature to speak of when the country will be admitted to the alliance. "As for the cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO on energy security, I want to say that gas deliveries from Azerbaijan to Europe began a few days ago. Azerbaijan will be a most active party in regard to energy and security issues," he said. (Interfax)

THREE AZERI JOURNALISTS SENTENCED FOR LENGTHY PRISON TERMS FOR BRIBERY

21 November

The Azeri Court for Serious Crimes has sentenced several journalists from two newspapers to lengthy prison terms, the court reported on Wednesday. Tofiq Abbasov, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Azerbaijan's Reality*, and Xaqani Mammadov, a journalist from this newspaper, were sentenced to ten and nine years in prison respectively. Uzeyir Aliyev, editor of the newspaper *Serious Signal*, was sentenced to eight years in prison. The defendants were found guilty of abuse of office and bribery. (Interfax)

RIVAL WILL NOT SUPPORT ARMENIAN EX-PRESIDENT'S ELECTION CANDIDACY

21 November

Opposition National Democratic Union Chairman Vazgen Manukian told a press conference in Yerevan on November 20 that he will not back former President Levon Ter-Petrosian's candidacy in the presidential elections scheduled for February 19, 2008, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Manukian, who ran unsuccessfully in the elections of 1991, 1996, 1998, and 2003, said he will participate in that ballot. In 1996, Ter-Petrosian's henchmen rigged the outcome of the first round of voting to preclude a runoff between Ter-Petrosian and Manukian. Manukian said that while he considers it "inevitable" that the present Armenian leadership be replaced, he does not think a return to power by Ter-Petrosian would improve the situation. "There are people who consider Levon Ter-Petrosian the lesser evil, but there are also many, many people who consider [Prime Minister] Serzh Sarkisian the lesser evil. And I don't rule out the possibility that if Levon Ter-Petrosian and Serzh Sarkisian go into a second round, Serzh Sarkisian will emerge as the legitimate president," Manukian said. Also on November 20, EU special representative for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby told RFE/RL's Armenian Service in Yerevan that he believes the February 2008 ballot will "express the maturity of Armenia's political system." He characterized as "positive" the anticipated "high degree of pluralism" in terms of competing political views. Semneby met in Yerevan on November 19 with Ter-Petrosian, who outlined proposals for precluding electoral fraud and complained that for weeks police have been systematically harassing his supporters. (RFE/RL)

CHECHEN OFFICIAL EXPLAINS MOTIVES FOR RESIGNATION

21 November

In a telephone interview with RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service on November 20, Akhmed Zakayev explained why he has stepped down as foreign minister of the unrecognized Chechen Republic Ichkeria (ChRI). Zakayev said that he believes that "everything that happens in the state should have a legal foundation, [and] everything should be done in accordance with the law." He said that for that reason, he considers it inappropriate to continue performing his duties

until the ChRI parliament names a new prime minister and forms a new cabinet. The parliament ruled earlier this month that Doku Umarov effectively relinquished the powers of the ChRI presidency by declaring a North Caucasus emirate of which he claims to be the leader, and it collectively assumed those powers. Zakayev stressed that "my resignation...should under no circumstances be viewed as a retreat from our fight for independence, for our freedom, and for the recognition" of the ChRI as an independent state. He further stated that "Chechnya at present is occupied, but it is not conquered...I am absolutely confident that the Chechen people have good reason to think that in the near future they will gain independence and live in a free, democratic country." (RFE/RL)

SPEAKER SAYS HIS VISIT TO AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC WAS "POSITIVE" **24 November**

Majlis Speaker Gholam-Ali Haddad Adel said his trip to the Azerbaijan Republic was 'positive and successful'. Speaking upon arrival in Tehran on Saturday, Haddad Adel said in his visit bilateral relations, Iran's stance on nuclear issue, the effects of pararegional powers' influence in the caucasus and Persian Gulf regions were discussed. Haddad told reporters, "Iran has donated a language laboratory for teaching the Persian language, computers and hardware to communicate with Iran's libraries and have access to Iranian books in the Azerbaijan Republic." The majlis speaker added, "It was decided in this trip that Foreign Ministry, through Iran's embassy in Baku, prepare facilities for Azeri pilgrims to Imam Reza holy shrine (AS) and also Azeri hajjis who travel through Iran to Mecca." Haddad added, "Scholarships have been granted to Azeri students who wish to complete their Ph.D or masters degrees in the Persian language." The majlis speaker said, "During my visit to the Azerbaijan Republic, I exchanged views with Azeri president, prime minister and parliament speaker about bilateral relations." He added he had invited his Azeri counterpart to pay a visit to Iran." Baku University granted an honorary doctorate degree to Iran's majlis speaker during this visit. Haddad also visited the tomb of Nezami Ganjavi, a Persian language poet, in the

city of Ganje and the 'King Abbas Mosque' as a historical site there. (IRNA)

GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT SCHEDULES EARLY PRESIDENTIAL POLL FOR JAN. 5 **25 November**

The parliament of Georgia on Sunday scheduled early presidential elections in the South Caucasus republic for January 5. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili stepped down on Saturday as he braced himself for early elections following mass street protests earlier this month. "From tomorrow [November 25], I am beginning an election campaign. During 40 days, Parliament Speaker Nino Burdzhanelidze will be acting president," Saakashvili told a government session. Georgia was rocked by opposition riots for six days earlier in November as protestors occupied central Tbilisi demanding the resignation of Saakashvili. The Georgian leader responded by sending in riot police to crack down on protestors on November 7, later declaring a state of emergency, which was lifted on November 16. Under mounting pressure from the opposition, Saakashvili announced snap presidential elections in Georgia in early January. On November 23, Georgia marked the fourth anniversary of the "rose revolution" that deposed former president and ex-Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze and brought the U.S.-educated Saakashvili to power. Political opponents claim that Saakashvili has since then become too authoritarian, and the opposition has said it wants to change the political setup to shift power away from the president, giving parliament a stronger role. Although now less popular both at home and abroad, with Western countries criticizing his handling of the political crisis, Saakashvili is believed to have a strong chance of securing reelection. A total of eight people have announced plans to run on January 5, including the opposition's single candidate, former businessman Levan Gachechiladze, and billionaire Badri Patarkatsishvili, who was at the center of recent unrest which saw hundreds injured in clashes between protestors and police. (RIA Novosti)

BLASTS KILL 8 IN AFGHANISTAN **26 November**

A roadside bomb and a landmine left over from a

previous conflict went off in Afghanistan on Monday killing eight people, including four Afghan soldiers, officials said. The landmine blast happened south of the capital Kabul, killing four civilians travelling in a car, a police official said. The soldiers were killed when an improvised device hit their vehicle hours later in the southeastern province of Paktia, a provincial spokesman said. After nearly more than 30 years of war, Afghanistan is littered with about 100,000 mines that kill or wound around 60 people every month, the United Nations estimates. Taliban insurgents fighting to overthrow the pro-Western Afghan government also continue to plant some mines, but prefer to use roadside and suicide bombs. Violence has surged in Afghanistan this year with more clashes, roadside bombs, suicide attacks and casualties as compared to 2006 and Afghan analysts say next year is expected to be more violent. (Reuters)

RUSSIA TO SUPPLY OIL TO CHINA VIA KAZAKHSTAN

26 November

Russia will start supplying up to five million tonnes (36.7 million barrels) of oil a year to China via Kazakhstan from 2008, the industry and energy minister said Monday. 'Following bilateral talks, the parties signed a protocol on Kazakhstan and Russia's oil transit in 2008. Under the protocol, Russia will for the first time start supplying five million tonnes of oil per year to China via Kazakhstan,' Viktor Khristenko said. Khristenko, who attended a session of the inter-governmental commission for Russian-Kazakh cooperation in the Central Asian country's capital Astana, said energy was a key element of bilateral relations, and that large-scale projects have been made possible by the strong interaction between the states. In particular, the parties are concluding preparations for an inter-governmental agreement on a Caspian natural gas pipeline. The pipeline from Turkmenistan, to run along Kazakhstan's Caspian coastline to Russia, is designed to pump 10-20 billion cubic meters of gas to Europe via Russia's pipeline network, and is a rival project to a Western-backed trans-Caspian pipeline bypassing Russia. (RIA Novosti)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN GETS UNDER WAY

26 November

No fewer than 22 potential candidates submitted documentation to Georgia's Central Election Commission on November 26 with the aim of registering to participate in the preterm presidential election scheduled for January 5, 2008. By contrast, six candidates succeeded in registering for the January 2004 presidential ballot and seven in April 2000, of whom one withdrew at the last minute. The hopefuls include incumbent President Mikheil Saakashvili; Levan Gachechiladze, who is backed by the nine-party opposition National Council; oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili; David Gamkrelidze of the New Rightists; Labor Party leader Shalva Natelashvili; Gia Maisashvili, head of the Georgia's Future party; former Imereti Governor Temur Shashiashvili; Soviet-era dissident Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia; lawyer Kartlos Gharibashvili, who ran unsuccessfully in the 1991, 1995, 2000, and 2004 elections; former Communist Party of Georgia leader Avtandil Margiani, and Fazil Aliyev, who represents Georgia's 500,000-strong Azerbaijani minority. In a televised address to the nation on November 26, parliament speaker Nino Burjanadze, who assumed the powers of president the previous day after Saakashvili stepped down to embark on his election campaign, called for "unity and calm" in the run-up to the January ballot and appealed to voters to "think carefully" before casting their ballots. Concurrently with the preterm election, a referendum will be held in which voters will be asked to say whether they think the next parliamentary elections should be held in the spring or the fall of 2008 and whether they support Georgia's hoped-for accession to NATO. (Caucasus Press)

KAZAKH CABINET APPROVES NEW E-GOVERNMENT PROGRAM

27 November

After a cabinet meeting in Astana, Kazakh Prime Minister Karim Masimov announced on November 27 that the government has adopted a new "e-government program" to introduce electronic services in the country. The effort includes measures aimed at introducing a new

national electronic voting system, and is part of the Kazakh government's broader agenda to develop and expand the country's information technology sector. (Kazakhstan Today)

AHMADINEJAD VOWS EXPANSION OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH TURKMENISTAN

27 November

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in a message on Tuesday to mark Iran's exclusive trade exhibition in Turkmenistan expressed hope that the event will provide the opportunity to showcase the capabilities of some 80 Iranian firms in the fair and expand economic cooperation between the two countries. In his message, the president underlined that the opportunity should be seized to broaden economic and industrial ties between the two countries. "I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Turkmen president for arranging such a remarkable event," he said. "We are ready to transfer our experience in the economic sector to Turkmenistan," said President Ahmadinejad. Iran attaches importance to expansion of ties with Turkmenistan, he said adding that is why the common frontiers have been named 'border of friendship and peace'. "We are now happy to witness that Turkmenistan is experiencing ever-growing development with success," Ahmadinejad said in the message. The two countries have had significant political, economic and cultural cooperation in recent years and the volume of trade exchanges between the two sides exceeded dlr 1.3 billion last year, said president in his message. "There are ample untapped economic potentials which should be further explored between Iran and Turkmenistan and we hope the active presence of some 80 Iranian firms would help broaden and bolster the scope of activities between the two countries," he said. Given scientific and industrial capabilities of the Islamic Republic of Iran 'we are ready to contribute to reconstruction as well as development projects in Turkmenistan', he said. There is no doubt that active presence of both countries in the Central Asian markets would be on top of Iran's agenda, the president pointed out. (IRNA)

CIS ENDORSES COMMANDER OF ABKHAZ PEACEKEEPING FORCE

27 November

CIS defense ministers voted on November 27 in Astana to extend the tenure of Major General Sergei Chaban as commander of the Russian peacekeeping force deployed since July 1994 under the CIS aegis in the Abkhaz conflict zone, civil.ge and kavkaz-uzel.ru reported. Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov said the peacekeepers are performing their duties well, but that Chaban will be replaced "in the near future." Saakashvili demanded Chaban's immediate expulsion from Georgia in the wake of a standoff between Russian peacekeepers and Georgian police last month. Speaking in Tbilisi later on November 27, Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili said the vote to extend Chaban's tenure was illegal because Georgia did not participate, civil.ge reported. Saakashvili signed a decree on November 25 on Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS Defense Ministers' Council. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN DEFENSE MINISTER HINTS AT WAR

27 November

The long-standing dispute over the Armenian-controlled territory of Nagorno-Karabakh could spark a new war if it remains unresolved, Azerbaijan's defense minister said Tuesday. "As long as Azerbaijani territory is occupied by Armenia, the chance of war is close to 100 percent," Safar Abiyev said during a meeting in Kazakhstan of defense chiefs from ex-Soviet republics. His startlingly worded remark was a reminder that Azerbaijan has not ruled out use of force in recapturing Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas. Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territory that is also part of Azerbaijan have been controlled by Armenian and ethnic Armenian forces since a shaky 1994 cease-fire ended one of the bloodiest conflicts that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. The six-year war killed 30,000 people and drove more than 1 million from their homes, including many of the region's ethnic Azeris. Azerbaijan and Armenia remain locked in a dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh despite more than a decade of coaxing from international mediators led by the

United States, Russia and France to resolve the region's status. Gunfire breaks out regularly along the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia and in the regions near Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian Defense Minister Mikhail Arutyunian said he sees no alternative to a peaceful settlement, the RIA-Novosti news agency reported. (AP)

ACADEMICIAN GUNNED DOWN IN DAGHESTAN

27 November

Academician Nariman Aliyev, 77, a renowned viticulture specialist, was found shot dead together with his wife at their home in the village of Mamedkala in Derbent Raion on November 26. Daghestan's President Mukhu Aliyev told journalists the murder was the work of "destructive forces" out to destabilize the situation in the run-up to the December 2 elections to the Russian State Duma. Aliyev convened a meeting of law-enforcement and security officials the same day to discuss the investigation into the killings of the Aliyevs and of Farid Babayev, who headed the Daghestan organization of the opposition Yabloko party. Speaking in Makhachkala on November 25, Yabloko leader Grigory Yavlinsky said Babayev was "a victim of Putin's authoritarian regime, which makes a point of physically annihilating its opponents," and that the Daghestan leadership shares responsibility for Babayev's murder, kavkaz-uzel.ru reported. Yavlinsky recalled that Babayev repeatedly protested official corruption and human-rights violations and criticized the republic's leadership. He further characterized Daghestan as "the most complex and dangerous region" of Russia and said the central government should intervene to stabilize the situation there. Meeting with Yavlinsky on November 26, President Aliyev categorically rejected his criticisms. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIAN GAZPROM HEAD AGREES TO PRICE HIKE FOR TURKMEN GAS SUPPLIES

28 November

Aleksey Miller, the head of Russia's state-run gas monopoly, Gazprom, announced on November 27 that the company will accept the terms of a major price increase for imports of Turkmen natural

gas, Turkmen Television reported. After a meeting in Ashgabat with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, Miller said an agreement was signed under which Russia will pay up to 50 percent more for Turkmen gas, increasing the price from the current \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters to \$130 in the first half of 2008, and to \$150 in the second half of the year. Berdymukhammedov also discussed the Russian-backed project to construct a new gas pipeline skirting the Caspian Sea, intended to export gas from Central Asia through Russian territory, and promised to commit to start construction in early 2008. Berdymukhammedov recently met with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov in Ashgabat, where he similarly agreed to sign a final agreement soon on that new Caspian natural-gas pipeline, which is to transport some 230 million cubic meters of gas daily, representing an annual increase of about 20 billion cubic meters of gas. The existing gas pipeline, constructed in the mid-1970s, runs from Turkmenistan via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to Russia and currently pumps around 50 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA'S LEADING OPPOSITIONIST ARRESTED IN BERLIN

28 November

Georgia's former defense minister Irakly Okruashvili, who is currently a leader of political opposition to President Mikhail Saakashvili, has been arrested in Berlin upon a request from the Georgian side. A source at the State Prosecution Service who reported the fact did not specify the date on which President Saakashvili's former closest political ally had been arrested. In the meantime, Okruashvili's Tbilisi-based lawyer Eka

Besselia told reporters Wednesday she did not have any information on her client's detention in Germany. (Itar-Tass)

TURKMENISTAN TO START WORK ON RUSSIA PIPELINE IN '07

28 November

Turkmenistan will start building a new gas pipeline to Russia as soon as later this year after Moscow agreed to pay more for exports through an existing route, state Turkmen media reported on Wednesday. The agreement on the Russia-backed Caspian Gas Pipeline linking Turkmen gas with global markets via Russian territory has been delayed due to a pricing dispute since September. "It has been agreed that the project should be launched before the end of the year," reported the state-owned Neutral Turkmenistan newspaper. Russian gas monopoly Gazprom agreed to raise the price it pays for Turkmen gas to \$130 per 1,000 cubic metres from \$100 in the first half of 2008. Turkmen President Kurbanguly Berdymukhammedov met Gazprom Chief Executive Alexei Miller on Tuesday. "The Turkmen leader and the chief executive of Gazprom have stated their intention to speed up the construction of the new route," Neutral Turkmenistan wrote. The Russia-proposed pipeline would have a capacity of 10 to 20 billion cubic metres a year. It rivals an alternative route to Europe across the Caspian Sea which bypasses Russia. Turkmenistan, which currently exports most of its gas through Russia, is also working on a separate pipeline to China. Some analysts have questioned the country's ability to go ahead with so many projects at once but Turkmenistan says it has enough gas reserves for everyone. (Reuters)