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Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* (www.cacianalyst.org) and described below.

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Analytical Articles: Analytical articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,000 and 1,300 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

Svante E. Cornell

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SPAT WITH RUSSIA HAS SAAKASHVILI NARROWING DOWN PRIORITIES

Jaba Devdariani

As he meets Russia's Vladimir Putin on June 13, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili will likely settle for even an illusory reconciliation with his northern neighbor. Russia's ban on Georgian wine and mineral water and open statements from Moscow alluding to possible rejection of Georgia's territorial integrity push the Georgian administration to narrow down its priorities. With the European Union visibly unwilling to find itself dragged into confrontation with Russia over Georgia, Saakashvili bets on NATO membership and is likely to move to clean house in the months preceding the local elections.

BACKGROUND: The Saakashvili administration has set itself an ambitious agenda. Its priorities include changing the format of the Russian-dominated peacekeeping operations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, setting the country firmly on a course towards NATO and the EU, and rectifying Georgia's decrepit infrastructure and economy. Now, the Georgian leadership finds that all of these priorities are impossible to pursue simultaneously.



An agreement to remove Russian military bases from Batumi and Akhalkalaki signed in May 2005 has, so far, been Tbilisi's largest success. This has predictably irked Russian politicians, military and bureaucrats, especially against the background of Tbilisi's

unwavering desire to join NATO as soon as possible. In this context, reforming the peacekeeping missions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to include international forces is met in Russia not only with discontent, but with unconcealed hostility.

Saakashvili's and his ministers' occasional militaristic rhetoric towards the secessionist provinces and momentous police escapades, especially in South Ossetia, has convinced Georgia's potentially most powerful ally in changing the peacekeeping format – the EU – to tread warily. As the current EU efforts are concentrated in Transnistria, there is not enough will to tackle Russia on yet another front, especially as the Georgian behavior proves hard to predict.

Russia has retaliated with an asymmetric but most damaging riposte, banning Georgian wine and mineral water – the country's primary exports – from Russian markets, along with Moldovan products. At the same time, top Russian officials, including the Foreign Ministry, have alluded to the fact that Georgia's territorial integrity might be a principle of international law, but the right to self-determination of nations is no less valid. Thus Moscow confirmed its official complacency in the past years' efforts to extend citizenship and economic benefits to residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Slightly more comically, Russia officially granted shelter to Igor Giorgadze, Georgia's former security chief and rumored KGB operative, who

is wanted for an assassination attempt on then President Eduard Shevardnadze in 1995. Kremlin-controlled media now positions Giorgadze as an alternative to Saakashvili.

IMPLICATIONS: Georgian businesses and wineries are dependent on Russian sales. Although the IMF analysis concludes the Russian wine ban would slow down country's GDP by an estimated 1 percent only, the political effect of the ban, affecting ordinary peasants as well as well-off traders, is far more damaging for Saakashvili. Russia suggested continuous retributions that would affect Georgian citizens living and working in Russia, from refusing to recognize Georgian university diplomas to banning currency transfers to Georgia. Conservative estimates of Georgians working in Russia stand at around two hundred thousand. These measures, if implemented, would also affect their families back at home, who depend on remittances, and might damage the stability of the Georgian currency.

Being at loggerheads with Russia has also been damaging on international stage. Saakashvili had to first tone down, and then almost completely relinquish his calls for EU membership. Certainly, issues independent from Georgia – European disillusionment with enlargement, political uncertainty in the Ukraine – played into the EU's reluctance to back the Georgian cause. However, many European bureaucrats are also unwilling to meddle into what seems to be an exceptionally venal spat between two neighbors. Although Saakashvili tried to involve the EU in expanding its participation in conflict settlement, he proved impatient of EU's tedious political process and unwilling to follow its 'long waves'. So far, the EU chose to limit its participation, dispatching delegations to state its general interest, and pledging financial support if conflicting sides come to an agreement, but staying clear of putting pressure on Moscow or contriving any sort of military or police participation.

Things have not gone too well for Saakashvili at home, either. Although the reform of the police has been one of his cabinet's most outstanding achievements, the police has been in the eye of damaging scandals recently. The public was outraged at the alleged involvement of high-ranking police officials in a bar-

brawl that led to the death of a young banker in January 2006. Later, the police's "shoot-to-kill" policy for assaulters and robbers came under close and unsympathetic public scrutiny. Most recently, the country's Public Defender has issued a scathing critique of the police as well as the penitentiary system, which is supervised by the Ministry of Justice. This has significantly weakened the position of the ruling National Movement party on its much-prized law-and-order dimension. An ill-tempered debate began to flare within the Parliamentary majority. These all are bad omens for Saakashvili, readying his party for the first serious electoral test after the post-revolution elation has died down, the local elections expected this fall.

Under these conditions, further escalation with Russia is hardly a viable option for Tbilisi. President Putin, on his part, would also like to present a positive dynamic in relations with Georgia, as its unfounded agricultural and wine bans as well as nasty political rhetoric from Moscow have been a smear on Russia's G-8 presidency. It is hence likely that both presidents will try to present their June 13 meeting as a success.

The chances for a real breakthrough, however, are slim. Georgia's priorities are in open contradiction to Russia's stated policies. Tbilisi will not relent in its efforts to join NATO, and in contrast to Ukraine, there is no serious public opposition to the idea in Georgia that Russia might exploit.

Nevertheless, there is room for pragmatic bargaining. Saakashvili has provided a glimpse of what he can offer – talk of leaving the CIS has been toned down, and the parliament delayed its discussion of announcing the Russian peacekeeping presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia illegal. In exchange, Saakashvili expects Russian acceptance of Tbilisi's South Ossetia peace plan, meaning, among other things, increased international participation in the political, if not military, arm of the peacekeeping operation. On Abkhazia, Tbilisi signaled a willingness to abandon all militant posturing and actively support the de-isolation of Abkhazia by opening the railway link with Russia and, perhaps, a sea link with Turkey. Tbilisi expects Putin to publicly support Georgia's territorial integrity and nudge Abkhaz leaders towards open dialogue. Putin can also decide to lift the blanket ban on

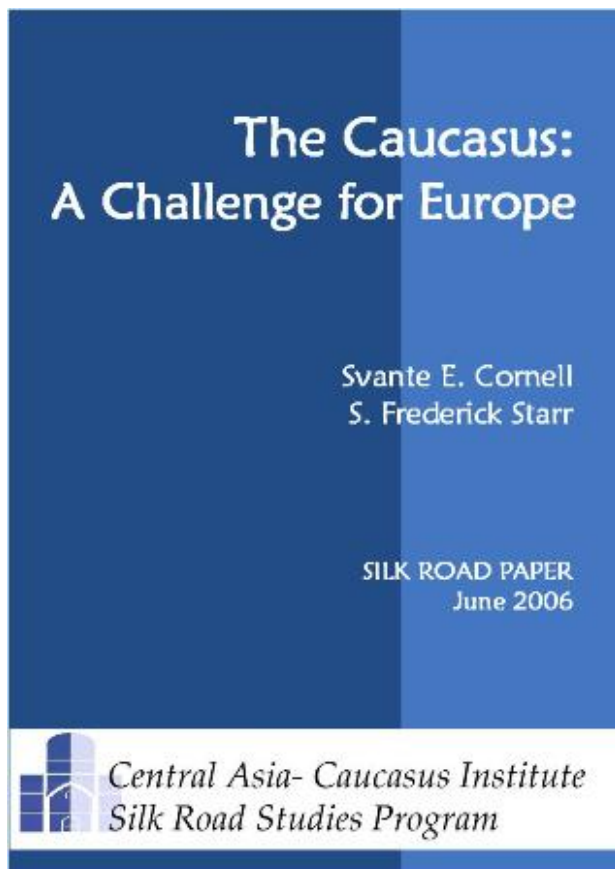
Georgian wines and mineral water, replacing it with a set of specific requirements that Georgian companies will have to meet to re-enter the Russian market.

Putin's positive attitude towards these matters would help him to start the G-8 chairmanship with a constructive streak. This will also help Saakashvili tidy his own political house before the local elections. However, Putin might well be of the opinion that he will be giving out far more than he is gaining in this trade. Now that Russia has discovered a taste for leaning on its troublesome neighbors through newly found economic means, the bureaucratic inertia will be hard to reverse. Not to mention the private interests of the regional elites in North Caucasus that benefit handsomely through shady property and business deals in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

CONCLUSIONS: President Saakashvili is likely to try to tone down the skirmish with Russia by offering several tactical concessions at the June 13 meeting in St. Petersburg. Georgia is also bound to narrow down its

political priorities to joining NATO, and put the EU ambitions on the back burner. Tbilisi is widely expected to receive an invitation for Intensified Dialogue with the Alliance during the Riga summit, which means eventual membership can be conceivable by 2008-2010. This is conditional, however, on relative stability in Georgia's domestic politics, which hinges largely on relative calm in the secessionist provinces and more temperate relations with Russia. Saakashvili comes to the vivid realization that this is a tall order, and requires continued public support to stand any chance of succeeding. In tactical terms, his absolute priority now is to gain a vital break on the foreign policy front, to solidify his party and increase chances of not only proving his democratic credentials during the local election campaign, but also winning those elections in style.

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New Silk Road Paper!

The Caucasus: A Challenge for Europe

by Svante E. Cornell
and
S. Frederick Starr

As the EU moves in a southeastern direction, it moves closer to the Caucasus, North as well as South. This creates both opportunities and challenges. Increasing interest on the part of the EU in the South Caucasus has been noted. This paper discusses the challenges faced by Europe in the region and seeks to propose steps for the EU to take in the Caucasus.

This 85-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

FOREIGN POLICY RE-ORIENTATION & POLITICAL SYMBOLISM IN KYRGYZSTAN

Yaşar Sarı & Süreyya Yiğit

Kyrgyz foreign policy is trying to find a new location for itself between Washington and Moscow. This is highlighted by the giant political poster campaign in the capital city Bishkek, the ongoing rental negotiations concerning the American air base as well as the expansion of the Russian air base under the umbrella of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. In economic matters, entry into the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) or permitting giant Russian monopolies such as Gazprom and Unified Energy Systems to enter the Kyrgyz market are other important matters occupying the minds of Kyrgyz decision-makers. The political symbolism expressed by a recent poster campaign is indicative of stronger Russian influence in Kyrgyzstan.

BACKGROUND: The past couple of months have seen increased activity in Kyrgyz foreign policy. In April, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev visited Moscow on his first official state visit. It was also in April that the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry issued a statement declaring that the rent paid for the Manas Ganci air base used by the United States needed to be renegotiated. Since the Tulip Revolution of March 2005, high-level U.S. policymakers have made several visits to Bishkek. These have included Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in July and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in October 2005. This was indicative of the support the United States was showing Kyrgyzstan after the Andijan events in neighboring Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz authorities were pleased to host their guests and maximized the opportunities provided by these visits in highlighting the attention that Washington was giving to them.

Currently, however, the streets of Bishkek are under the close scrutiny and gaze of Russian policy-makers. One may argue that this is not a new phenomenon but now, in a literal sense, the billboards of the capital are littered with photographs of President Bakiyev shaking hands with President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister

Mikhail Fradkov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. They are not highlighting an upcoming election, but rather the April trip made by the President to Russia.

The political symbolism of these giant photographs sheds much light onto the Kyrgyz political system. One is aware that a political system is more than a set of laws, institutions, political actors, or procedures. It is also the belief structure of what a society stands for, why it exists, and what it ultimately means – the foundation upon which political power is built and legitimately exercised. The persistent communication and display of symbols and rituals of political meaning is central to the process of both legitimizing and strengthening the hold of President Bakiyev on the Kyrgyz power structure.

IMPLICATIONS: The majority of Kyrgyz citizens focus less on abstract feelings and meanings about foreign policy and much more about individual governmental policies, domestic security and unemployment, which remain chronic social problems. In terms of economics, the Kyrgyz political elite is divided over entry into the HIPC initiative advocated by the World Bank and the IMF. In fact, U.S. Ambassador Mary Jovanovich

was quoted as saying that “Kyrgyzstan cannot afford not to join the program”. The issue centers around whether the conditional debt relief will indeed benefit Kyrgyzstan and what impact it will have on its foreign relations.

In terms of decision-making, the billboards seem intended to transform and personify the abstract notion of the Kyrgyz state, thus extracting love and loyalty from the people for President Bakiyev.

In order to maintain a stable and functioning political system and to be able to adapt it when needed requires a regular reproduction of political culture as well as reproduction of the present and creation of new political roles and structures. This function of a political system is performed, correspondingly, through political socialization and political recruitment. The recent public campaign that is being witnessed in Bishkek is a good example of this, whereby the Kyrgyz public is being socialized into regarding Russia as a natural partner and eternal ally.

The various photos of President Bakiyev with Russian decision-makers promulgate a new shift in emphasis in foreign policy and the creation of a myth of traditional and historic Russo-Kyrgyz affinity and solidarity. The Kyrgyz government is aiming to develop symbols of community designed to encourage the people to identify themselves with them—and to uphold and defend them as though their very own being and the meaning of life itself were at stake.

In July 2005, at the Astana Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and at the insistence of both Russia and China, a decision was taken to ensure United States military forces left Central Asia. This was justified by the war on terror no longer being accepted as a viable reason for this presence. Kyrgyzstan had agreed with this summit statement and its recent actions are an indication of it pursuing a balancing policy in both the economic and military sphere with regard to the great powers.

Kyrgyzstan is simultaneously trying to join the HIPC program as well as inviting the Chairman of Gazprom to Bishkek to encourage heavier Russian

investment. Militarily, it is also accepting the enlargement of the Russian Kant airbase alongside the functioning of the American Manas Ganci airbase in return for higher rental fees from the latter. This verifies that economic reasons are not negligible.

CONCLUSIONS: President Bakiyev was recently quoted as warning Washington that it had until June 1, 2006, and not a day longer to draft and sign a new accord. The rent for the Manas air base sought by the Kyrgyz authorities from the United States is almost half the national budget. Yet this bluff by Bakiyev was called by Washington, as no agreement concerning the base had been signed two weeks past this deadline. The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry has reiterated that the base will continue to operate as normal.

The pressure mounted by domestic opposition towards the Kyrgyz government and the resignations of high ranking ministers and state officials such as State Secretary Dastan Sarygulov have encouraged a strong lurch towards Moscow, especially in the economic and military dimensions. Moreover, recent clashes on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border have demonstrated the Kyrgyz state’s lack of military capacity, and have been a factor influencing the Kyrgyz decision to conduct joint military maneuvers with Russia.

It is precisely this new orientation that is being supported and reemphasized by the poster campaigns on the streets of Bishkek. Given the fact that the Moscow visit was in April, the only explanation for these posters still remaining in June is to encourage and demonstrate to the public that it is not the United States, but Russia which is closest to the Kyrgyz nation.

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THE “CARTOON CRISIS” IN IRANIAN AZERBAIJAN: IS AZERI NATIONALISM UNDERESTIMATED?

Emil Souleimanov

Just as international talks on the Iranian nuclear program were coming to a head, a crisis emerged showing that the Islamic Republic is not as monolithic as it would like outsiders to believe. The publication in a state-run newspaper of a text in which Iranian Azerbaijan is compared to a rubbish heap and the Azeri minority is depicted as a cockroach did not go unnoticed. Tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis, who make up close to a third of Iran’s population took to the streets in protest in the Azerbaijani-dominated cities of Tabriz, Orumiye, Khoy and Sulduz as well as in Tehran. The Azerbaijanis have drawn attention to themselves as a mighty, though heretofore latent, force in the Islamic Republic.

BACKGROUND: The matter of this unfortunate caricature is not an isolated affair. Indeed, it cannot be viewed simply in the context of Persian national folklore, in which the image of an “Azerbaijani” is depicted as the embodiment of rural stupidity, headstrongness and craftiness, as feeling lost in an urban environment and as speaking with a comical accent. The roots of the current crisis run much deeper.

Beginning in the 11th century, Iran – a term that once had a much broader semantic content than it has today – was conquered and ruled by Turkic dynasties and clans, although these were subsequent subjected to strong Persian cultural influence.

This was not reversed until 1925, when Reza Pahlavi seized power in Tehran and founded the first purely Persian dynasty in almost a millennium covering all of Iran. The careful cultivation of Persian nationalism followed. This was to become the leading ideology in a multiethnic state that had always been distinguished by a high degree of ethnic and religious tolerance. Discrimination of ethnic minorities became a matter of state policy. This involved to no small degree the Turkic Azerbaijanis, who made up the largest ethnic community after the Persians, and had close cultural and linguistic ties to Soviet Azerbaijan and Turkey. The independent ethnic and linguistic identity of the Azerbaijani

Turks was rejected. Official ideology continues to regard them as turkified Persians, “Aryans” in origin.



Streets of Tabriz, May 2006

The 1979 Islamic Revolution somewhat reduced overt Persian nationalism, giving way to Shiite Islam, which is common to all of the country's nationalities apart from the great majority of Kurds. Yet the character of Iran as a state mainly of Persians remained unshaken. To this day, teaching in Azeri is prohibited in schools.

Tehran's concerns increased with the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the pan-Turkic nature of former President Abulfaz Elchibey, calling the "reunification of Azerbaijan a question of five years at the most." Iran even supported Christian Armenia against mainly Shi'ite Azerbaijan in the war. In the early 1990s, Tehran took preventive measures: it broke up the Iranian province of Azerbaijan into several provinces, and continued to almost exclusively put Persians into office as leaders there. The government is also settling Kurds in areas bordering the Republic of Azerbaijan, seeking to create a sort of *cordon sanitaire*. To further Tehran's strategy, conflict is being stirred up between Kurds and Azerbaijanis. As a result, talk about "Persian fascists" has mostly been heard from among Azeri intellectual emigrants, promoting from exile in Europe and America the idea of a national revival, freedom and Turkic unity.

Meanwhile, for ordinary, well-integrated Azerbaijanis holding leading economic, political and military posts in the Islamic Republic, the role of a common enemy is played rather by "Kurdish bandits."

IMPLICATIONS: The fifteen years of existence of an independent Republic of Azerbaijan, increased communication with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, and satellite broadcasts from both countries have spurred to a new level the national consciousness of Azerbaijanis, who are identifying themselves much more clearly with their "Turkic brethren" to the north and west.

The cases of ethnically motivated unrest in Iranian Azerbaijan have gradually multiplied. These occasionally resulted in clashes with police, though the successive liberalization of Iranian society under former President Khatami allowed the use of Azeri

in local media, although limited in scope and frequency. The conservative come-back under President Ahmadinejad brought renewed restrictions in these recently gained benefits, which inevitably led to mounting protests among frustrated minorities. Consequently, the "cartoon crisis" was a triggering factor, whereas the demonstrations revealed the increasing strength of Azerbaijani nationalism.

Current events are the best indicator of this development. The temporary shutdown of the newspaper, the arrest of the author of the column and caricature, and the public compliments of certain highly-placed Iranians calling Azerbaijanis a "heroic people", and similar actions, did not reduce the size of the protests - in spite of the brutal attacks of the Iranian police and the threat of torture in prison. The demonstrations lasted for over two weeks without respite, until the deployment of tens of thousands of elite army and police troops in the northwestern provinces. At the demonstrations, which are not unprecedented but way larger than any previous ones, calls were voiced for ethnic autonomy and the *de facto* legalization of the Azeri language in public sphere.

Many observers both inside and outside Iran wondered who was behind the demonstrators, and whether the publication of the caricature was a coincidence. Three possibilities have been advanced. A first claimed that the events were planned long in advance, organized by the illegal organizations seeking the independence of southern Azerbaijan. Coincidentally or not, Prof. Mahmudali Chehragani, leader of the banned Southern Azerbaijan National Revival Movement, has been received since 2003 in Washington at a very high level. Western forces favoring the collapse of the Iranian regime, the story goes, would take advantage of serious unrest in Iranian Azerbaijan and its brutal repression to organize another "humanitarian intervention", for which the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey could be used as a bridgehead.

A second version, conversely, sees the events as a provocation on the part of Tehran, which is trying

in this manner to pre-empt any pre-planned events. Thus the protests broke out before they were supposed to, so the regime had the chance to effectively disrupt the rebels' underground before a massively organized action could begin. Iranians traditionally see the origins of the unrest in the influence of the ubiquitous Americans, British and Jews, and are calling for national unity.

Whatever the merits of these theories, none is particularly credible. This was in all likelihood a spontaneous protest event. The public sphere in Iran is under strict control by the secret services, and in this situation, no "color revolution" would be feasible, nor could such large protest have been planned without being disrupted. It is also highly unlikely that the small Republic of Azerbaijan or Turkey would risk a serious armed conflict with powerful Iran, which almost certainly would occur in case their territory is used for attacks against Iran. This view is lent credence by the fact that the Turkish and Western establishments have taken little interest in events in Iranian Azerbaijan. The demonstrations went virtually unnoticed in Western media.

CONCLUSIONS: Blood spilled in violence is not forgotten, and the thoughts that have awakened the Azeri masses from their lethargy will not disappear overnight. Since the days of Sattar Khan's Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), in which he led the masses primarily in southern Azerbaijan against the Shah, the current events represent a significant experience of common resistance and mutual suffering. This experience could act as a catalyst for the activity of various separatist or irredentist groups within Iran itself.

As experience around the world has shown, indiscriminate state repression creates and expands the circle of potential avengers among the population, increasing the importance of insurgents' appeals. An appropriate ideological base begins to

profile itself, and the resistance movement is indoctrinated into it. The activities of illegal groups trigger a cycle of violence. Created or strengthened soon thereafter are links to supporters from abroad or adherents from within. Within Iran's borders, these could be insurgents from among the Arab or Kurdish minorities that also have somewhat tense relations with Tehran.

A rather strong polarization of identity and ideology is taking place among Iranian Azerbaijanis, developing along generational lines. The Azeri youth, along with young Persians, Baluchis, Turkmens etc., are ever more rejecting the current government of mullahs, which has meant life in a less than prosperous country with many restrictions. The ethnic factor then ties in with socio-economic factors and overall dissatisfaction with the regime. Also apparent is a certain ideological vacuum in the country, caused by the weakening attraction of political Islam, especially among the young generation. While older generations generally have attitudes that are more reserved, and feel stronger loyalty to the idea of an Iranian state, the Azeri youth is yearning for a life of freedom, and the West is ever more closely associated with Turkey and even independent Azerbaijan where their counterparts experience greater freedom and prosperity. Pan-Turkic nationalism and pan-Western sentiments are gradually becoming a sort of escape from current problems. No wonder, then, that crowds in Iran were shouting slogans like "Baku, Tabriz, Ankara, Biz hara, Iran hara?" (Baku, Tabriz, Ankara, where are we going, and where is Iran going?).

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ARMENIA'S RULING COALITION UNRAVELS

Grigor Hakobyan

Last month, beset by numerous defections of a number of deputies from the Orinats Yerkir (Law-Governed Country) faction and mounting differences between Orinats Yerkir and its coalition partners, the speaker of Armenian Parliament, Artur Baghdasaryan, resigned from his position. The change in Armenia's ruling coalition underscored the immaturity of many political forces in Armenia and created a new political reality in the country that may also have certain implications for the foreign policy of Armenia in the region.

BACKGROUND: On May 29th, Artur Baghdasaryan officially relinquished his position as the Chairman of National Assembly of Armenia. His resignation was caused by growing differences between his party and the presidential administration, as well as its partners in the coalition, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) and the Republican Party of Armenia. To some external political observers, the history of disagreements between the outspoken Chair of National Assembly, often accused by his opponents for engaging in populism, began last year. At the time, Artur Baghdasaryan accused the ruling government of engaging in voting irregularities on the eve of the constitutional referendum in Armenia and forwarded a list of recorded cases of alleged voting misconduct to the Supreme Court for review.

The tensions between him and the member coalition partners, as well as the presidential administration, continued to increase when he further ventured into the foreign policy field and began making statements on various issues pertaining to Armenian-Russian, Armenian-NATO and Armenian-Turkish relations. Specifically, he advocated the pursuit of NATO membership for Armenia, retaliatory actions toward Russia for their decision to raise gas prices for Armenia by charging the difference in gas prices for the hosting of Russian military base in the country. The last straw for Baghdasaryan's career in the ruling

administration came after he made calls for reviewing the 2001-2003 privatization decisions, due to various fraudulent tenders that he alleged had occurred during the implementation of the controversial privatization program.

IMPLICATIONS: Baghdasaryan's active advocacy with a view to scrutinizing the country's recent privatization program caused discontent among many of his party's business elite, who benefited from the above-mentioned privatization program and saw their positions endangered from their association with the ever more vocal Baghdasaryan, whose criticism of the ruling administration failed to subside. The defection of nearly a dozen of parliamentarians associated with Orinats Yerkir resulted in the decline of the party's faction in the Armenian National Assembly and undermined the party's role in the coalition government. That also showed the main weakness of the party, which was the lack of a unique political vision that would attract people regardless of whether the party is a part of the ruling government or the opposition.

Artur Baghdasaryan was considered the most outspoken politician advocating NATO membership for Armenia, as well as rapid integration into European political structures. His pro-European views earned him the title of "The Best European of the Year". Very often, he was perceived by various political observers as the most likely candidate to earn the largest number of votes in the next presidential elections. However, his

subsequent demise and the party's positioning as an opposition force toward the current authorities, coupled with the desertion of many wealthy businessmen that provided financial backing for the party, may seriously undermine his chances to win the upcoming presidential elections in 2008. Very few wealthy businessmen would ever consider to back a political opposition force, thus undermining their own access to the ruling administration which provided them with the opportunity to prosper in the first place.

The Orinats Yerkir party's past membership in the ruling coalition does not attract make it appealing to the current opposition forces in Armenia either, as many of the opposition forces view the transition of Orinats Yerkir from party of power into a party in opposition as another calculated political move by the presidential administration of Armenia to further split the less than cohesive opposition. Meanwhile, other opposition forces consider the sudden move of Orinats Yerkir party into the opposition camp as a calculated pre-election move on behalf of Baghdasaryan, designed to further his personal ambitions by first distancing himself from the ruling administration and secondly creating a momentum to recreate himself for the purpose of enlarging his electorate and creating an opportunity to pick up additional votes from a portion of Armenian voters who would otherwise have voted for a mainstream opposition candidate.

Another factor to consider is the potential for the remaining parties in power, the Republican Party of Armenia and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutiun), if successful in the upcoming parliamentary elections, to eventually play a decisive role in speeding up the realignment of political forces in Armenia by consolidating them into a more cohesive and clear-cut political spectrum where a line between liberal and conservative ideologists would be easier to distinguish. The amorphous political situation in Armenia has created a situation where most political parties lack a clear political vision. They mostly feed off empty rhetoric, and their would-be members rally around specific personalities and not

specific policies. Parties may pride themselves by the number of their party memberships, yet this only increases or decreases depending on whether the party in question is in power or in opposition and not by any tangible accomplishments for the benefit of the people. Clearly, this situation is not sustainable.

CONCLUSIONS: The transition of the Orinats Yerkir from a party in power to a party in opposition was long anticipated, as the disagreements within the ruling coalition became more transparent after the passage of the Constitutional Referendum in Armenia. The controversies over voting irregularities during the Constitutional Referendum, differences over the country's foreign policies, and the common belief among the two junior partners of the government led by the Republican Party of Armenia – that is Orinats Yerkir and the ARF – that they were cheated out of votes during the parliamentary elections could not but undermine the effective work of the coalition government. Indeed, Orinats Yerkir is not the only disgruntled party: the continuous tension between the ARF and the Republican Party could further split the ruling coalition by resulting in the exodus of another party from the coalition government.

As Armenia's parliamentary elections of 2007 are fast approaching, it is expected that further splits, consolidations and the introduction of new political parties in the nation's political life will continue to occur. As a number of well-known oligarchs and government officials rush to create new political parties to vie for the laurels of power, strengthening their own positions and advancing their personal agendas, the common electorate will continue to feel ostracized and further disfranchised from the entire political process. The situation will change only if and when people realize that their votes do really matter and that they do have a power to a make a difference in the life of their country.

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FIELD REPORTS

UZBEK COMMUNITY IN KYRGYZSTAN WANT UZBEK AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Joldosh Osmonov

On May 27, 2006, hundreds of people in Jalalabad took to the streets in a peaceful rally, demanding that the Kyrgyz government make the Uzbek language official. The protesters, headed by Parliamentarian Kadyrjan Batyrov and the Uzbek National Cultural Center, were furthermore asking for constitutional changes and reforms in the government. The rally ended with a resolution with 10 propositions sent to the Parliament and the President. But President Kurmanbek Bakiev at the meeting of all branches of power on June 7, 2006, declined the possibility of granting the Uzbek language official status.

400 delegates of the region's Uzbek community on May 24, 2006, at the people's kurultay in Uzbek National Cultural Center (UNCC) decided to hold a rally demanding designation of Uzbek as an official language in Jalalabad on May 27, 2006. The President of the UNCC Kadyrjan Batyrov stressed that the protest was not connected with the bigger opposition meeting in Bishkek scheduled the same day.

Despite many promises by UNCC leaders on holding a meeting with several thousand participants, only 600-700 people took part in the protest. The main demand of the action was the recognition of Uzbek as an official language. Other demands included constitutional reforms and reforms of judicial and law enforcement bodies. Parliamentarian Kadyrjan Batyrov and Abdumutalip Hakimov noted in their speeches that

the Uzbek people are native residents of the southern part of Kyrgyzstan and the Uzbek language has a right to gain official status. The Governor of Jalalabad oblast, Iskender Aidaraliev, also participated in the meeting. "Nobody is violating the right of Uzbeks who make up 24 percent of the total population of the oblast", he said. The day before the rally, the Governor noted in a televised address that "there are 35 Uzbek language schools in the oblast, Uzbek television and newspapers operate on the same level as the Kyrgyz ones".

In an interview to the "Litsa" newspaper on June 1, Batyrov stated that Uzbeks are the second biggest ethnic group on the territory of Kyrgyzstan, totaling a million people. "I think the recognition of Uzbek as an official language will bring positive results," said Batyrov. He also stated that it will help solving the problem of expansion of religious extremism. "When Uzbek young people see no future because of lack of knowledge of the Russian and Kyrgyz languages, they join religious extremist organizations which are very active in the south."

Batyrov said that local governments did everything to hamper the conduct of the rally. According to the Parliamentarian, a special committee to hamper the meeting was created by Governor Aidaraliev. Local law enforcement bodies intimidated the Uzbek population and forced them to abstain from participation the meeting, said Batyrov in the interview.

A member of Parliament from Jalalabad electoral district #30, Batyrov is one of the leaders of Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan. He owns several spinning and cigarette factories in Russia and Uzbekistan. Before becoming a Parliament member, he was President of the Airline "Batyrov Air". He is President of the Jalalabad oblast Uzbek National Cultural Center (UNCC).

During the May 30, 2006 session, members of Parliament discussed this issue. Most of the deputies criticized Batyrov, accusing him of destabilizing the situation in the south. Parliamentarians agreed that this kind of initiative could lead to a repetition of the inter-ethnic clashes in the south of Kyrgyzstan in 1990. According to Soorobnay Jeenbekov, "some Parliament members gamble on the language issue in order to earn some points before the Uzbek population". Some deputies from the southern part of Kyrgyzstan argued that their Uzbek electors were against this initiative. In particular, Kamchibek Tashiev said that the leaders of the Uzbek Diaspora in his electoral district asked him to settle the current highly explosive situation.

The problem surrounding the Uzbek language was also raised at the meeting of State Secretary Adahan Madumarov with OSCE High Commissioner on

ethnic minority issues Rolf Ekéus on June 2. Ekéus emphasized the necessity of constant dialogue around the Uzbek language. The State Secretary disagreed with the OSCE official, saying that Kyrgyzstan is a unitary country, not a confederation, and it is not going to grant the Uzbek language official status. "It would not be right if the OSCE High Commissioner on ethnic minority issues aggravated the current situation while trying to help to solve the problem", said Madumarov.

President Kurmanbek Bakiev, in turn, made a clear statement on the Uzbek language issue. At the meeting of all branches of power on June 7, 2006, Bakiev stated that the Uzbek language will not be recognized as an official language. The President called upon the members of Parliament to stop destabilizing the situation.

In the light of these events, mass media related the detention of Bazarkorgon rayon UNCC branch head Mamatkadyr Karabaev on June 6, on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. However, the head of Jalalabad oblast police department Nurlan Temirbaev stated the proceeding against Karabaev was instituted in 2003 for embezzlement. "There is no any hidden motive in the detention of Mr. Karabaev," said Temirbaev.

RISING FOOD PRICES IRK GEORGIANS AS AGRICULTURE FALTERS

Kakha Jibladze

Georgians are feeling the pinch of higher prices as the government's war against contraband takes root and the cost of oil rises. According to the Georgian Ministry of Agriculture, the only solution is a reduction of imports. While the higher costs are likely the fault of a combination of factors, the increase in prices is adding to a general

dissatisfaction with the government and the reform process.

During a televised meeting with the president and other government officials, Minister of Agriculture Mikheil Svimonishvili announced that prices would continue to rise as long as Georgian farmers were not contributing to the market. According to him, the country imports even basic necessities, such as

eggs and vegetables. Over the past several months, Georgians have seen the price of staples like sugar jump from a stable one lari to 1.34 lari and higher. Meat prices have been on the rise for the past year; last summer a kilo of beef cost between six and seven lari – now it is closer to nine or ten lari.

The minister explained the government has initiated several programs for Georgian farmers, including water irrigation projects, in an effort to support the development of local agriculture. In addition, wide scale land privatization is under way. While it is widely believed that over half the Georgian population supports itself by farming, the vast majority of such farms are subsistence-based and do not produce enough goods to sell for additional income. Traditionally, part of the problem has been the size of individual land plots. During the first wave of land privatization in the early 1990s, each family was awarded a patch of land equaling 3 acres. According to experts in land ownership, while that was enough land to save Georgians from starving during the economic crisis following independence, it is not enough to support farming as an industry.

Another factor – in addition to the rising fuel costs and higher electricity prices – is the ongoing effort to reduce contraband. With more businesses paying taxes and other government fees, consumers are increasingly footing the bill.

The higher costs have not gone unnoticed. While the government has made good on promises to pay pensions on time and raise salaries, Georgians are quickly realizing that their paycheck means less and less. During his presentation in June, the minister defended the government's decision not to control prices. He noted that if Georgians want to preserve lower costs they need to produce more at home. According to agricultural experts, the country has the resources and climate to produce a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, wheat and other products. The problem is that there has been a lack of investment in these sectors. Several new grant programs from both the United States and the European Union are

earmarked for rural development. The Millennium Challenge Account Georgia implies an impressive \$295 million grant from the United States, and officially got started in April. It should start distributing grants to farmers as early as this summer.

However, the higher prices are taking on a political tone. After a year of minor scandals and the beginning of several tough reform programs, the National Movement and President Mikheil Saakashvili have both taken a beating in the polls. While there is still no sign of a competent opposition candidate to threaten the president or the ruling party, the government is already airing pro-administration advertisements on the major television stations to build up public support before the local elections in the fall. In addition, President Saakashvili has sanctioned several populist moves in an effort to head off voter dissatisfaction.

In April, he presented farmers in Kakheti with 500 new tractors and promised that more are on the way for other regions throughout the country. In addition, he has promised tax breaks and other aid for those involved in the wine industry to help cushion the fallout of the Russian embargo.

Representing over 17 percent of the nation's GDP, agriculture is Georgia's largest industry. However, a decade of severe neglect means Georgian farmers are not prepared to produce products for their own countrymen – let alone export for a profit. As prices – and voter dissatisfaction – rise, the government is under increased pressure to support the agricultural sector. Tbilisi's decision not to support prices artificially is admirable and conforms to the goal of creating a free market economy. However, while an estimated 50 percent of the population lives in poverty, some protection for the most vulnerable part of the population while the projects and programs take root could make a difference for hundreds of thousands of Georgians.

KAZAKHSTAN LAUNCHES ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

Marat Yermukanov

As Kazakhstan nears its politically important objective of chairing the OSCE in 2009, Astana looks set to intensify its anti-corruption efforts, a crucial issue placed high on the agenda by political parties, including the pro-presidential Otan. The spectacular war on corruption-related crime also has economic motivations. Astana needs more foreign investment to ensure social stability in the country.

Speaking at the June 1 session of the Security Council, President Nursultan Nazarbayev erupted with harsh criticism of the unbridled bribery and cronyism among top government officials. In an unprecedented manner, he provided the names of crooked judges and high ranking officers of law-enforcement bodies bogged in the mire of bribery, and demanded the immediate dismissal of dozens of corrupt officials. Giving the reasons for such harsh measures, Nazarbayev stressed that Kazakhstan, in order to achieve the goal of joining the 50 most competitive countries of the world, should wage an uncompromising war on corruption as it poses a serious economic threat to the country.

It was not the first time that the leadership vowed publicly to eradicate economic crime among government members and top officials. But this time, words were followed by harsh measures. On June 7, a Security Council spokesman announced that 37 officials were indicted on corruption charges and 29 officers of the Interior Ministry, Customs Agency, financial police, tax committee, Ministry of Environment and prosecutor's office were sacked.

The President cited numerous cases of bribery and abuse of office among the judges. But according to current legislation, judges can be dismissed from their posts only by presidential decree. In the past, sporadic campaigns against corruption were limited to half-hearted measures which targeted mainly minor civil servants, leaving intact the well-organized network at the government level. Some of the most scandalous cases of organized crime have already become known to the public through the press. Among the arrested on criminal charges are the deputy head of the security department of the Interior Ministry, the chief of the security department of the South Kazakhstan division of the ministry, and the head of Khogos customs crossing-point on the Chinese border.

It is hardly incidental that the impressive clampdown on corruption took place on the eve of the third Investment Summit held in Almaty on June 8, sponsored by the *International Herald Tribune*. Addressing the summit, Nazarbayev said that Kazakhstan "attaches great importance to attracting investment in developing our economy, and all favorable opportunities have been created in the country for development". By Central Asian standards, Kazakhstan is indeed a success story, with 80 per cent of all Central Asian investment located in the country. The summit made a favorable impression on foreign investors who praised the attractive investment climate in Kazakhstan, although some of them complained about bureaucratic procedures in government offices.

Whatever may be the outcome of the renewed anti-corruption efforts, this campaign is fully in line with the demands of western democratic institutions and political parties for stamping out economic crimes. Even the daughter of the president, Dariga Nazarbayeva, has repeatedly called for the establishment of public control over the activities of local government bodies stressing that corruption-related crimes erode the future of the country. The ruling regime seems to recognize that the rising level of corruption raises doubts about the seriousness of Kazakhstan's intention to carry out radical political reforms. Speaking at a meeting of the state commission for drawing up and defining a program of democratic reforms, he tried to dispel these doubts and said the time has come to start the implementation of tasks on political modernization. An important part of the political reforms drafted by the government is the introduction of local self-government in the

regions, and the election of akims (governors) on local levels.

But a majority of people, disillusioned by numerous similar decorative moves in the past, are skeptical about the prospect of political reforms. In fact, according to a government-initiated draft law, local akims are to be elected not by direct voting, but by members of local legislative bodies (maslikhats). That means that local governors remain subordinated to central government and will not be accountable to people.

President Nazarbayev in his public speeches invariably advocated a "step-by-step" political reform, taking into account Kazakhstan's national interests. This approach finds a considerable support in society. On the other hand, it is hardly likely that western states, concerned to maintain good relations with oil-rich Kazakhstan, will at this stage press the government for radical political reforms.

KYRGYZ PROGRAM ON DECREASING IDD LEVELS FAILS TO ACHIEVE AIMS

Janyl Bokonbaeva

Although declared a priority by successive Kyrgyz governments, the national program on fighting iodine deficiency disorders suffers from numerous drawbacks and is unlikely to be completed in due manner.

Kyrgyzstan has a long record of IDD. The problem was almost completely eradicated by successful prophylaxis and treatment in Soviet times, but overall decline in public health care in 90s led to rapid re-emergence of this problem: 42% to 65% of Kyrgyz schoolchildren had endemic goiter in 2000.

In the framework of combating IDD, international development agencies have provided invaluable

assistance to the Kyrgyz government in the form of technical assistance and consultancy support, humanitarian aid, legislative inputs, capacity building and a large-scale communication and education campaign.

Thus attempts have been made to elaborate a national Vitamin and Mineral Deficiency elimination strategy, and introducing Universal salt iodization (USI) as a joint initiative of the government, the donor community and civil society. However, the National Program for Decreasing IDD Levels in the Kyrgyz Republic for the years 2003-2007 is not being satisfactorily

implemented. An accurate and transparent system of IDD registration and monitoring is practically non-existent in the country.

Data assessment and communication, as well as monitoring and evaluation, are essential phases of any IDD elimination program. Yet widespread confusion and manipulation of data reporting persists, and is conducted by Kyrgyz regional public health departments, control organs and national Ministries alike. Assessment capabilities remain relatively weak, despite key technical and capacity building input on the part of the international community. The Sanitary Epidemiological Service (SES) is allowed to conduct salt iodine tests only once a year, which is definitely insufficient for a competent monitoring and requisitioning process. Moreover, the SES is obliged to warn the respective entity about the monitoring check ten days in advance, which creates ample possibilities for the former to conceal counterfeit and non-iodized products.

Due to financial constraints and a lack of human resources, only cluster studies instead of more illuminating nation-wide IDD medical surveys can be conducted by the Ministry of Health. The city Endocrinology Dispensary is in a deplorable state.

Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan is totally dependent on importing salt, and the absence of viable border control had led to large-scale illegal import of technical and non-iodized salt. There is no domestic Kyrgyz salt production, although the first National Program of Prophylaxis of Abnormalities Related to Iodine Deficiency, signed in September 1994, mandated the creation of a national salt mining and manufacturing industry. Natural salt mines in Kyrgyzstan demand numerous investments, as the salt is extremely high in contaminants and the technological process of purification would be complex and expensive. In the absence of a Kyrgyz national salt mining and processing industry, imports nevertheless account for only 15 percent of total annual iodized salt consumption. The creation of a Kyrgyz association of salt producers seemed to give hopes of a sustainable and proper salt iodization and packaging process in the country.

However, extensive smuggling of non-iodized salt and of low-quality iodized salt is an alarming fact. In 2004 alone, the SES confiscated more than 73,000 kilograms of inadequately iodized salt.

Likewise, controls have shown great amounts of counterfeit products in shops and markets all over Kyrgyzstan, since fraudulent businesses forge packets of well-known brands. The general economic situation is also mirrored in the salt business, as insufficient self-monitoring by producers and the concealment of real output and sales volume for the purposes of tax evasion remain widespread.



Poster promoting iodized salt. (www.ceecis.org)

The leakage of technical salt to human consumption markets is another point of concern. It is estimated that technical salt now comprises a vast proportion of overall country salt sales. Although a number of

governmental and presidential decrees and laws regulate IDD control and mandate universal salt iodization in Kyrgyzstan, the adoption and development of this legislation has been a painful process. Early documents (the first National Program and its Action Plan) suffer from multiple shortcomings. In general, these included ultimately unattainable goals, poor overview, and a lack of control mechanisms. Although every IDD elimination program requires a representative and full-fledged national body for program coordination and implementation, the Ministry of Health cannot cope with the multiple responsibilities of IDD eradication accorded to it by law. Under conditions of a drastic decrease of social spending, from 3,6 percent of GDP in 1996 to 1,8% in 2001, the Ministry lacks the financial and human capacity to perform national IDD prophylaxis and monitoring salt quality.

Moreover, overall political and moral fatigue and the steady deterioration of state mechanisms over the past years led to weak IDD legislation enforcement, and severe loopholes in the legislation itself. Resistance from certain political and business lobbies has resulted in prolonged legislative formalities and perpetual sabotage of the USI strategy. A lack of transparency and civil control over decision-making, characteristic of the entire Kyrgyz political system, has equally had a negative

influence on the National Program's elaboration and realization.

All these factors have a negative impact on the country's IDD status. According to the former UNICEF Resident Representative in Kyrgyzstan, Richard Young, 72 percent of the country's population is trying to buy only iodized salt, but 40 percent of sampled salt sold as iodized is actually not. Also, quality monitoring on salt import, production, storage and sale level need to be strengthened considerably.

The prompt adoption of the Law "On Introduction of Modifications and Amendments to the Law of the KR "On IDD Prophylaxis"" and introduction of technical regulations on fortified products is indispensable. Additionally, the importance of IDD communication cannot be overestimated.

Hence, the success of the IDD elimination program in Kyrgyzstan depends on numerous factors combined. These include a viable national decision-making and project implementation body functioning on a long-term basis; the creation of a working system of encouragement and economic incentives for producers of fortified products; efficient multi-sectoral participation in iodization programs; and ensuring sustainability by constant control and monitoring.



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

NEWS DIGEST

ARMENIAN, AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENTS AGAIN FAIL TO REACH KARABAKH AGREEMENT

6 June

Following their talks in Bucharest on June 4, Robert Kocharian and Ilham Aliyev met again on June 5, this time for 45 minutes, to continue their discussions on ways to resolve the Karabakh conflict, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The two presidents failed, however, to reach any agreement and declined to make any statement to journalists. Asked to comment on the talks, Kocharian stressed that the two sides have agreed that the negotiating process should remain confidential. Ambassador Steven Mann, who is the U.S. co-chairman of the OSCE Minsk group that seeks to mediate a solution to the conflict, said only that the talks were "very, very detailed." Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov said that Azerbaijan's position remains unchanged and that unspecified disagreements still have to be overcome. Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian implied that the primary sticking point in Bucharest was the same as that which thwarted an agreement during the two presidents' previous meeting in February at Rambouillet, outside Paris. Addressing a forum of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization in Bucharest the same day, Kocharian stressed that the population of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic availed themselves of the right to self-determination in accordance with international law, and he urged "effective efforts for the full-scale integration of the republic into the international community." He affirmed Armenia's readiness to continue talks with Azerbaijan on resolving the conflict. Aliyev for his part insisted that Azerbaijan's territorial integrity cannot be a subject of negotiation. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT SIGNS LAW ON REGIONAL FINANCIAL CENTRE OF ALMATY

6 June

President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has signed laws "On a regional financial centre of the city of Almaty" and "On the introduction of amendments and supplements in some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on issues of creating a regional financial centre of the city of Almaty," journalists learnt at the presidential press service. The idea of

creating an international financial centre in Almaty, whose services will be used by the region's countries, was put forward by Nursultan Nazarbayev in June last year. "The direct task of the diplomatic corps of Kazakhstan is to help attracting major companies with their technologies and management to Kazakhstan," the Kazakh president said. "With this aim in view, we are ready to create any preferences for investors." (Itar-Tass)

ARMENIA CONCERNED BY ATTACKS ON CO-ETHNICS IN RUSSIA

7 June

The Armenian Foreign Ministry has informed its Russian counterpart of its concern over continuing violence against Armenians in the Russian Federation, Deputy Foreign Minister Gegham Garibdjianian told the Armenian parliament on June 6. Russian neo-Nazis and skinheads have killed six Armenians so far this year, he said. On June 5, Armenian NGOs staged a protest outside the Russian Embassy in Yerevan to protest the most recent killing, of a

19-year-old Armenian man by rampaging youths on a Moscow suburban train, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. (RFE/RL)

IRAN MAY TRY TO JOIN CASPIAN OIL PIPELINE

7 June

A top Iranian energy official said Wednesday that Iran could negotiate pumping its oil from prospective Caspian oil fields through the U.S.-backed pipeline intended to carry the rich Caspian Sea oil resources to Western markets. Mahmood Khaghani, the Caspian department chief in the Iranian oil ministry, said that Iran's relations with Azerbaijan were solid enough to discuss an opportunity for Iran to pump its crude into the pipeline that carries oil from Baku, Azerbaijan, to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. "We are currently exploring for oil in the southern Caspian," Khaghani told reporters when asked whether Iran could join the pipeline consortium. "Our relations with Azerbaijan have been developing so successfully that, if we get positive results in the southern Caspian, we could discuss the issue." He said, however, that "the

companies which today are pumping crude through the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline could decide tomorrow that it's more feasible to carry oil to world markets via the Iranian territory." "Economic feasibility should be the main factor," said Khaghani, who attended a Caspian energy conference in Baku. The U.S.-backed Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, which opened in May 2005, allows the West to tap oil from the rich Caspian Sea fields, estimated to hold the world's third-largest reserves, bypassing Russia and Iran. The full official launch of the 1,760-kilometer (1,100-mile) pipeline will take place in the southern Turkish port of Ceyhan on July 13. It is eventually expected to bring 1 million barrels a day of Azerbaijani crude to Ceyhan for export to the West. British oil giant BP PLC is the pipeline consortium's main participant and the largest foreign investor in Azerbaijan's oil sector. (AP)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION LEADER REFUSE TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT

7 June

Kyrgyz opposition leaders refused to meet with President Kurmanbek Bakiyev on Wednesday. The opposition leaders, most of whom are members of the national parliament, said the president was aware of their demands and there was no need to meet him. Earlier they had insisted on the meeting and criticised the president for his refusal to meet them. As a result, the more than seven-hour meeting between the president, the parliament, and the Felix Kulov government lost its intrigue. Summarising the discussion, Bakiyev said, "I still have no doubts there was a need for a tandem with Kulov in May of last year." They made the deal two months before the presidential election, Kulov had agreed to remove his candidature for the presidency and become prime minister if Bakiyev won. "At that time it was the only correct decision even though we are told all the time that the tandem agreement has no legal force. Time has passed but we are still working," the president said. Bakiyev warned against dissolving the parliament ahead of time because "there are sound forces in it" and there is no sense in dissolving the whole parliament "because of five or six people." He also rejected an administrative and territorial reform plan proposed by the deputies. They suggested reducing the number of regions and districts and therefore the number of bureaucrats. "This can be done when there is economic growth in the country. We will gradually come to that but later. We may try to implement this project in one district at first," Bakiyev said. (Itar-Tass)

KAZAKHSTAN PLANS OIL PIPELINE TO CASPIAN COAST

8 June

Kazakhstan plans to build a 950km-long oil pipeline from the country's major Kashagan field to the Caspian coasts by 2010, a Kazakh official has said. It will be possible to transport between 5m and 36m tons of oil a year through the new pipeline to the Kazakh terminals on the Caspian shores for its further export to Europe via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan main export pipeline, Vice-President of Kazakhstan's KazMunayGas state company, Zhaksibek Kulekeyev, said. As for the construction of a sub-sea oil pipe from Kazakhstan to Baku, Kulekeyev said it was possible to build the pipe over a year and half if the littoral states reach a final decision on the status of the Caspian Sea. The Caspian states have divergent views on how to divide the sea. Iran insists that each of the coastal countries get equal portion of the sea-bed, while most other countries want the division based on shoreline, which would give Iran a smaller share. (azernews.net)

KAZAKHSTAN TO JOIN AZERBAIJAN-TURKEY PIPELINE PROJECT IN JUNE

8 June

Kazakhstan is ready to sign an agreement on shipping crude across the Caspian Sea to a pipeline from Azerbaijan to a Turkey, the president of the energy-rich country said Thursday. Nursultan Nazarbayev, speaking at an investment summit in the commercial capital of the Central Asian country, Almaty, said: "This month we will sign an agreement with the Azerbaijani government on linking Kazakhstan to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline." The 1,100-mile BTC pipeline enables Azerbaijan to supply crude from its oil fields off the Caspian coast to Western markets via the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. The Kazakh president said, "The agreement will be signed during the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia in Almaty." Under the agreement 25 million metric tons (183 mln bbl) of crude a year will be transported from Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan. During the first stage, 7.5 mln tons (55 mln bbl) will be shipped from the Aktau port across the Caspian Sea each year, to Azerbaijan's capital Baku. The volume of investment will be decided after the agreement is signed between the two countries' governments. By the end of 2006, the BTC project will be pumping around 300,000 bbl/d of crude to the Mediterranean. The pipeline is expected to meet its throughput capacity of 1 mln bbl/d by 2008. Eventually, half of the pipeline's supplies will come from Azerbaijan and the other half from Kazakhstan.

The main shareholders in the BTC project are London-based oil major BP (30.1%) and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (25%). (RIA Novosti)

IRAN PLANNING TO RAISE IMPORT OF KAZAKH OIL

8 June

Official Tehran supports the idea of oil transporting by tankers from Kazakhstan in a view of scheduled increase of Iranian oil refineries capacities, reportedly said Mahmud Hagani, director general for Caspian affairs with Iran's Ministry of Oil, speaking in Baku at «Sustainable development of oil&gas operations in Caspian Sea» conference. Hagani said Iran supports this project as managers of oil refineries in Iran are eager to raise capacities.«For example, oil refinery in Tabriz will be designed to process 500,000 bbl of oil a day. The refinery is launched in 2010», - he said.

Alongside, Iranian official said Tehran has its program targeted to raise sustainability of Caspian oil projects. «Iranian route is one of the future ways to transport Caspian oil to world markets», - he said, calling port Neka 'golden gates to Persian Gulf'. «This port has a storage capacity 1.5mln bbl and is currently storing some oil of Neka brand. Tehran is planning to further extend Neka terminal», - Hagani said. (Trend)

GEORGIAN POLICE FIRE AT SOUTH OSSETIAN CAR, WOUND TWO - OFFICIAL

9 June

The Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia has announced that a Georgian special police squad fired at a South Ossetian car, wounding two people, on Friday. The squad of about 60 men, drove into Avnevi, an ethnic Georgian village that is currently outside South Ossetian control, Irina Gagloyeva, head of the Information and Press Committee of the South Ossetian government, told Interfax. Before this, they showed Georgian criminal police cards at a South Ossetian checkpoint outside Avnevi, she said. Having entered Avnevi, the Georgians began to stop South Ossetian vehicles passing through the village. After attempts by South Ossetian police to intervene, the Georgian policemen opened fire on one of the cars passing by. Two passengers were wounded. The Georgian police evacuated one of them, and villagers rescued the other. "After the incident, the [Georgian special police squad] motorcade, consisting of 10 Hummer vehicles, set off toward the Georgian town of Gori," Gagloyeva said. (Interfax)

ABKHAZIA CANNOT BE INDEPENDENT - BURJANADZE

9 June

Abkhazia will always be a part of Georgia, and no independence is negotiable, Georgian Parliamentary Speaker Nino Burjanadze said at a parliamentary meeting on Friday after Georgian presidential envoy on the Abkhaz settlement Irakly Alasaniya presented a settlement plan developed by the Georgian government. The essence of the plan does not differ from Georgia's approaches to the settlement, and the result is giving Abkhazia the status of an autonomy within a single Georgian state. Alasaniya presented a number of principles underpinning the plan, including the restoration of confidence between the parties to the conflict, the return of all Georgian refugees to Abkhazia, regardless of their nationality. (Interfax)

GEORGIA MAKES PUBLIC PLAN FOR ABKHAZIA PEACE SETTLEMENT

9 June

Georgian President's personal advisor for peace settlement of the conflict in the much-troubled secessionist region of Abkhazia, Irakly Alasania, has made public the basic provisions of a plan for Abkhazian peace settlement. As he addressed a session of national parliament Friday, Alasania said Georgia's central government speaks in favor of drafting a joint Georgian-Abkhazian 'road-map' program based on the principle of territorial integrity within this country's internationally recognized borders and on an unconditional return to Abkhazia of all the refugees who left it during the armed conflict of 1992 and 1993. "The central government is ready to begin consultations with Abkhazian leaders on granting the region a broad internal sovereignty inside Georgia proceeding from the principles of a federation," Alasania said. "Special conditions will be set up for Abkhazia's economic development, national language and culture, historic heritage, and participation of the region's representatives in the central agencies of power," he indicated. "In cooperation with the Abkhazian side, the government is ready to produce an unbiased assessment of the root-causes and circumstances of the 1992-1993 armed conflict," Alasania indicated. Parliament Speaker Nino Burdzhaniadze, who took the floor after him, said: "Georgia advocates a peaceful settlement of the conflict, but a situation where the Georgian government will ever agree to Abkhazia's separation from the rest of the country is totally out of the question." (Itar-Tass)

KAZAKHSTAN PRESSING EU TO JOIN TRANS-ASIAN RAILWAY PROJECT

9 June

Kazakhstan is seeking to engage the European Union in the project of a new trans-European railway, which is supposed to link Shanghai with Brussels and to offer competition to Russia's famous Trans-Siberian Railway (Transsib). Earlier, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development took a rather skeptical stance on the project, the estimated cost of which runs into 4 billion euros. A number of Kazakhstani companies is holding talks with the EU at the moment in a bid to secure their participation in the giant construction venture. The railway will be 4,500 kilometers long and will run from Kazakhstan's eastern border to Turkmenistan to Iran to Turkey. The project-makers even plan building a special tunnel for it under the Bosphorus Strait. For the time being, however, the European Commission is more inclined to a project of building branch-outs from Transsib than to proposals on an entirely new railway. Nonetheless, Kazakhstani businesses press for launching the construction sometime before the end of the year. They hope to complete it by 2011. (Itar-Tass)

UZBEKISTAN INTENDS TO CLOSE NGO RUN BY US

9 June

The Uzbek Justice Ministry has demanded to close an office of the non-government organization Central Asian Free Exchange (CAFE) run by the United States. A document demanding to close this organization has been submitted to Tashkent city court on Friday, the press service of the Tashkent Supreme Court said on Friday. Violation of the organization's Charter and its missionary activities are said to be behind the resolution. Earlier, non-government organizations were closed in Kokand, Fergana, Nukuss and Samarkand, and fines were administered to a number of CAFE personnel, the press service said. Attempts made to convert Islamic and Orthodox believers into Protestant faith both arouse protests from the clergy of traditional confessions and pose a threat to society, Tashkent said in an official statement. The CAFE headquarters are based in Florida. The NGO Charter envisages that NGO should attend to problems of cultural exchange, agriculture, medicine, development of entrepreneurship. The CAFE office had worked in Uzbekistan since 1992. (Itar-Tass)

KYRGYZSTAN READY TO SUPPLY ELECTRICITY TO CHINA

10 June

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev said his country is ready to supply electricity to western regions of China. Kazakhstan is the third-largest hydroelectric power producer in the CIS and can export 142 billion kilowatt/hours a year, Bakiyev said at a Chinese-Kyrgyz economic forum in Beijing. He urged Chinese companies to invest in the creation and modernisation of Kyrgyzstan's power generation more actively. The president will end his first state visit to China on Saturday. (Itar-Tass)

CHINA AND KYRGYZSTAN AGREE TO LAY RAILWAY

10 June

China and Kyrgyzstan plan to enter into discussions in the near future over the technical details and financing of a project to lay a railway that will also connect the two countries with Uzbekistan. The daily Renmin Ribao says this intention is part of the joint declaration signed on Friday at the end of negotiations between China's President Hu Jintao and Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. The declaration states the two countries' readiness to cooperate in the struggle against all forms of terrorism, and to maintain interaction along these lines with the other member-countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Alongside the joint declaration another 13 documents on partnership and cooperation in trade, the economy and social and humanitarian spheres were signed in the presence of the Chinese and Kyrgyz leaders. The Chinese government will provide a grant to Kyrgyzstan, and a Chinese bank will extend a loan on favorable terms. In the course of the two-day state visit to China ending on Saturday - the first one for the Kyrgyz leader - Bakiyev met with the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Wu Banguo and Premier of China's State Council Wen Jiabao. (Itar-Tass)

TAJIKISTAN URGES THOROUGH INVESTIGATION OF ATTACK ON ITS STUDENTS

10 June

Official Dushanbe urged Russian authorities to investigate the latest attack on Tajik students in Moscow "most thoroughly and objectively." "The Tajik side is concerned about the attack on and brutal beating of students, the citizens of Tajikistan, who are studying at State Management University in the city of Moscow," the Foreign Ministry said in a note to

Russian Ambassador in Dushanbe Ramazan Abdulatipov on Saturday. The ministry urged Russian authorities to "bring the perpetrators to justice ... and prevent such incidents" in the future. Meanwhile, the Moscow Prosecutor's Office said a policeman had been detained on suspicion of beating the Tajik students. It said in a statement that the policeman, 27, is employed by the interior department of the southeastern district of Moscow and was "an active participant in the attack" on the students. "In the near future he will face charges and the issue of his placement in custody will be decided", the office said, adding it continues to search for other attackers. The Prosecutor's Office launched criminal proceedings for hooliganism and banditry. Prosecutors said "a man in civilian clothes knocked on the door of a room in the university's dormitory at about 20:00 Moscow time on Wednesday. A Tajik student opened the door. The man presented himself as a policeman and showed an identity card. Six people broke into the room after him and began beating six Tajik students with a wheel box, leather belts and feet." "During the beating one of the victims dropped a mobile phone, which one attacker picked up, after that they escaped from the crime scene," prosecutors said. Moscow Prosecutor Anatoly Zuyev took the case under personal control and ordered to take all necessary investigating measures to identify the people who had committed the crime as soon as possible and bring them to justice. (Itar-Tass)

MORE JOINT ACTIONS AGAINST TERRORISM MEET INTERESTS OF ALL SCO STATES - DIPLOMAT

12 June

All member-states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) support the strengthening of cooperation in security and resistance to terrorism, Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Li Huei has said. "At present China as well as other SCO countries are targets of the plans of international terrorists. Therefore it is a common aspiration of SCO member-states to strengthen cooperation in security and resistance to terrorism, extremism and separatism," he told a Monday briefing dealing with the summit beginning in Shanghai on June 15. He said that the anti-terrorist exercises held in the SCO framework on both a bilateral and multilateral basis are an important component of this resistance and that the practice will continue. "SCO exercises serve to strengthen peace and stability in the region and throughout SCO and they are not directed against third countries or organizations," he said. (Interfax-China)

ANOTHER TRAIN WITH MILITARY HARDWARE FROM RUSSIA BASE LEAVES GEORGIA

13 June

Another train with military hardware and weapons from the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki left the Georgian district center of Tsalka for Russia on Tuesday. Twenty-five artillery traction engines, 13 armored reconnaissance vehicles and patrol vehicles, as well as spare parts for them are supplied to Russia, a source in the headquarters of the Russian Troops in the Transcaucasia told Itar-Tass. The train consisting of 21 wagons will cross the Georgian-Azerbaijani border on Tuesday afternoon. The withdrawal of military hardware and weapons from the Russian base in Akhalkalaki began on May 15. Four trains have already gone to Russia. The train that went on Tuesday is the fifth one, the next train will leave Tsalka for Russia on June 20. (Itar-Tass)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT REAFFIRMS BID FOR OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP

13 June

Speaking at an OSCE-sponsored conference in Almaty, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev said on June 12 that if his country's bid to assume the rotating chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009 is successful, this would enhance stability in the region. Nazarbaev added that chairing the OSCE in 2009 would also enhance Kazakhstan's importance "as a bridge between the East and the West" and enable the country to become "one of the 50 most competitive nations in the world." The bid could be hindered by the country's human rights situation and by an electoral record seen as falling short of OSCE standards of democracy -- most recently in the December 2005 reelection of President Nazarbaev, whose landslide victory was criticized by international observers. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH COURT CUTS PRISON SENTENCE FOR CONVICTED SECURITY OFFICIAL

13 June

A district court in Almaty issued a ruling on June 12 to reduce the prison sentence of former National Security Service Colonel Arat Narmanbetov. Presiding Judge Tleules Nakisbekov said his decision to reduce the lower court's sentence is based on Narmanbetov's poor health. Narmanbetov, originally sentenced to a one-year prison term after being convicted by a district court for libel, received a much less restrictive one-year sentence with conditional probation. The

conviction stems from an interview in which Narmanbetov alleged Kazakh First Deputy Foreign Minister Rakhat Aliev was complicit in the murders of prominent opposition leader Altynbek Sarsenbayev and two other people. Aliev is married to President Nazarbaev's eldest daughter. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ FOREIGN MINISTER REPORTS ON TALKS OVER U.S. BASE

13 June

Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Alikbek Dzhekshenkulov announced at a June 12 news conference in Bishkek that a second round of bilateral talks with the United States over the use of an air base in Kyrgyzstan will be convened soon, ITAR-TASS reported. Negotiations held last month over the use of the strategically located Manas Air Base reportedly remained stalled over financial terms. The Manas facility is critical to U.S.-led coalition operations in Afghanistan, and the U.S. reportedly pays an estimated \$2.7 million annually to lease the base. (RFE/RL)

FOREIGN TROOPS DIE IN AFGHANISTAN

14 June

Two US-led coalition soldiers have been killed in separate clashes with suspected Taliban militants in Afghanistan, the US military says. A number of suspected insurgents were also killed or hurt in air strikes which followed, a spokesman said. Attacks blamed on the Taliban and their allies have risen

sharply this year, with hundreds of people killed. More than 30 foreign soldiers have been killed in action in Afghanistan this year, most of them American. On Sunday, a UK soldier and another member of the US-led coalition were killed in separate incidents in the south. (BBC)

COMPROMISES NEEDED TO SETTLE CONFLICTS - PUTIN

14 June

Russian President Vladimir Putin believes that conflict settlement is a complicated issue. The conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia "were not started by me and Mikheil Nikolayevich [Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili]. These are the conflicts we inherited from the past. If everything had been OK, we would have no problems today. But we have them, and they are very deep," Putin told reporters in St. Petersburg on Wednesday after completing talks with his Georgian counterpart. Conflicts cannot be settled "by a knife and razor, we need patience, the wish to seek compromises, and first of all, the people's will [to live together], and to achieve this, we must work out a way of putting out bridges, and not between Russia and Georgia, but between the people of South Ossetia and Georgia," Putin said. "This requires patience and true longing for such accords. Stable long-term relations cannot be built on any other basis," the president stressed. (Interfax)

