

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The 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.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what author's write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Each 700-900 word analytical article must offer a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, The Analyst does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

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Analytical articles require a three to four sentence 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.

Analytical article structure:

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

BACKGROUND: 200-300 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: 200-300 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.

Specifications for Field Reports:

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. 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. 500-700 words.

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

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THE SURPRISE OF ABKHAZ ELECTIONS

John Mackedon

As the presidential election debacle that followed the October 3 voting process in Abkhazia slowly approaches a conclusion and the answer to who will take over as President of the de facto republic becomes clearer, other crucial issues, specifically Abkhazia's relationship with both Russia and Georgia, have begun to blur. Initial reports by the Central Elections Committee (CEC) in Abkhazia claimed that the Kremlin-backed candidate, Raul Khajimba, had gathered enough votes to ensure a victory and rule out the possibility of a run-off election. But when these reports were retracted and all signs began to point to a victory for Khajimba's main opponent, Sergey Bagapsh, officials in the de-facto republic sent a clear statement: Abkhazia is not a Russian puppet state.

BACKGROUND: The ensuing struggle has resulted in a number of resignations and appointments, including the appointment of Nodar Khabasha, who openly stated that he was sent directly by Russian President Vladimir Putin to help "stabilize" the situation in Abkhazia as well as the resignation of the Chairman of the CEC as well as the filing for resignation by the Chairman of the regional Supreme Court; it has not, however, resulted in a final President-elect.

Abkhazia has practiced de-facto independence since it split from Georgia after a civil war in 1992-93, a war that was clearly won through Russian intervention. Since that time the breakaway republic has had only one president, Vladislav Ardzinba, who assumed power before the war had even played itself out and was ultimately elected president in the first two presidential elections held in the region, in 1994 and 1999. A two-term limit imposed by the self-styled Abkhazian constitution dictates that a new President will lead the country during one of the most crucial times for the de-facto republic. Although five candidates were officially registered in the elections, only two, Khajimba and Bagapsh, were considered as having legitimate chances for victory; Khajimba because he was supported by both the outgoing President and the Kremlin; Bagapsh because of the backing he received from the two main opposition movements in the region,

Amtskhara and United Abkhazia, and, as it turns out, because of his loose ties to the Georgian population. During Ardzinba's rein as President, a small but significant portion of the 250,000 Georgian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) returned to the Gali District of Abkhazia. Because of this factor, the Gali District has become the central focus of controversy during the recent elections. Bagapsh, who is married to a Georgian, is considered a heavy favorite in this particular voting district, but Khajimba is claiming that a number of votes were cast by people carrying Georgian passports and not the required Russian or Soviet passport.

Both Sergey Bagapsh and Raul Khajimba share similar political backgrounds, having both served as Prime Minister of the breakaway republic. But the roles they played during their time as Prime Minister greatly differ, a fact that may have heavily influenced the surprising outcome of the region's third ever presidential election—the first election wherein voters were given an actual choice of candidates. Bagapsh, who currently heads the Abkhazian Power Company ChernomorEnergo, was Prime Minister of the de facto republic from 1997-2001, a time wherein the real danger of a renewed conflict with Georgia existed and an outbreak of violence did occur in the region in the spring of 1998 which ultimately led to the evacuation of some 30,000 ethnic Georgians

from Abkhazia. During this time period, however, President Ardzinba was strongly exerting his executive authority and the Prime Minister played a very secondary role, so much so that ex- President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze once commented that Bagapsh never passed a resolution without President Ardzinba. Khajimba, on the other hand, had been Prime Minister for the last year and a half before stepping down to run in the October elections, a time in which the current head of the republic has been too ill to even make public appearances – thus allowing Khajimba to assume many of the presidential duties. This situation may have directly influenced voters who are dissatisfied with the situation in Abkhazia and viewed Khajimba as an incumbent candidate.

IMPLICATIONS: Post-“Rose Revolution” Georgia is prioritizing territorial integrity as the number one domestic policy pursued by President Mikhail Saakashvili’s government. With the recent re-integration of the Adjara Autonomous Republic back into Georgia and continual actions taking place in Georgia’s other de-facto republic of South Ossetia, Abkhazia is facing a heightened amount of political pressure to begin resolving the conflict in the region. The newly elected President will have to contend with a steadily growing population of ethnic Georgians in the region, the Washington-backed Saakashvili regime as well as Russia’s agenda, recently increased in the region after the Beslan tragedy, all the while maintaining the self interests of the breakaway republic and preserving its ultimate goal of independence. The recent election, to some degree, has shown that Abkhazia is doing just that—looking after its own affairs by distancing itself slightly from Russia, its most staunch ally. The initial reports by the election committee harmonized with Russia’s desires for the region, but when these reports were later refuted by the regional CEC who openly declared Bagapsh the outright victor, Abkhazia

has seemingly refuted Moscow by letting them know that their support is not enough to decide a presidential election and that any future move towards independence may be assisted, but not directed, by the Kremlin. This recognition of the voting potential in the Gali District also alludes to the fact that Abkhazia is ready to make steps towards accepting this Georgian minority as part of their overall push towards independence.

CONCLUSIONS: As Abkhazia sorts out its election entanglement and waits for a Supreme Court decision regarding a potential re-vote, both official Tbilisi and official Moscow must begin structuring a new Abkhazia policy based on this latest maneuver by the de-facto authorities in the region to exert further independence from both sides. While Tbilisi tows the line that it makes no difference which candidate wins the presidential elections in Abkhazia and Bagapsh assures that his victory will result in Abkhazia moving further in the direction of Russia, it appears that the surprising October 3 elections will force both sides to re-evaluate these positions. By openly refusing the ascension of the Russian-backed candidate to the position of President, Abkhazian officials have clearly defined a more limited role for Russia in the political atmosphere of the republic. And Tbilisi, for its part, must begin grappling with a new scenario that could lead to more direct negotiations with the de-facto authorities, without the underlying presence of the Kremlin. While these new developments may not lead to large changes in the crisis in the immediate future, they could very well open the door for a much needed fresh approach to the stalemated crisis.

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A STRONG JAPANESE INITIATIVE IN CENTRAL ASIA

S. Frederick Starr

Japan has long been one of the most active powers in Central Asia, allocating over \$2 billion from 1992 to 2002. This year, Japan embarked on a major new initiative in the region, based on continuing its bilateral activities but launching a new dimension, a region-wide dialogue with all five regional states that will periodically consult as a group. The concrete developments of this new regional forum remain to be seen, but it certainly is aimed to put Japan at par with other regional players in the region. Japan's economic weight is certain to give the initiative attention in the region. Japan's move is in full harmony with American interests in Central Asia, and represents a step toward the creation of a 'concert' of interested powers.

BACKGROUND: In late August Japan unveiled a major new initiative with respect to the five countries of Central Asia formed after the collapse of the USSR. Since 1992 Japan has pursued an active if low-keyed policy of supporting economic and social development in the new states of Central Asia. Down to 2002 it had allocated a total of \$2.36 billion US in grants, technical cooperation, and loans to the region, including \$915 million to Kazakhstan, \$909 million to Uzbekistan, \$345 million to the Kyrgyz Republic, \$54 million to Tajikistan and \$55 million to Turkmenistan. It has supported 2,600 trainees in Japan and sent out 1,100 experts and volunteers from Japan to the region. Its 1997 Silk Road Diplomacy Program organized these and other programs under a single umbrella of bilateral relations with each country.

Now it has stepped up that engagement with an intensified program built on two pillars: first, the continuation and expansion of existing bilateral activities and, second, the enhancement of that work with a new region-wide initiative that it calls the "Central Asia Plus Japan Dialogue." Minister of Foreign Relations Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi launched the new initiative at a meeting with Central Asian foreign ministers held in Astana, Kazakhstan on 26-27 August.

The new program commits Japan and the five Central Asian states to consult regularly as a group and carry out joint programs that will foster region-wide interaction and development. Central Asian countries were represented by their foreign ministers except for Turkmenistan, which sent only an ambassador. Since the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs treats Afghanistan as a Middle Eastern country it is not included under the initiative, but Japanese programs to improve transport to the South and other initiatives involving Afghanistan suggest that Central Asia Plus Japan will be attuned to Afghanistan's needs and possibilities as well.

A wide variety of initiatives have already been proposed, the list to be refined at a follow-up meeting. Judging by past Japanese projects in the region, one can assume it will include training and other work to combat the financing of terrorism, improve immigration and customs controls, provide aviation security, improve local administration and policing, develop the legal systems and transparency, support small and medium sized businesses, and promote advancements in the areas of energy and the environment.

Of particular interest is the fact that Japan proposes to venture deeper into the areas of democracy building. In Astana Japan's

Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke of the compatibility between developing a country's unique culture and "realizing a democracy which respects the inherent dignity of human beings." In particular, she pointed to the damage that "vested interests" can do to a country, and noted that Japan's post WWII development hinged on its decision to stop paying salaries to the old samurai. Her call for "significant moral physical courage" in the cause of reform was not lost on her audience.

IMPLICATIONS: Japan has ratcheted up its involvement with Central Asia, taking advantage of its commitment to non-military solutions and programs. This change does not affect the Caucasus, however, which remain on the periphery of Japan's interest, notwithstanding energy sources there. Also, Karabakh is a major stumbling block to deeper Japanese engagement in the Caucasus.

By creating yet another forum for Central Asian regional dialogue, Japan follows the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Central Asia Cooperation Organization, Economic Cooperation Organization, and many other groups, not to mention all the major international banks and development agencies.

Central Asia Plus Japan Dialogue is not without political meaning, however, as Russia's and China's keen interest in the project confirms. While Japan disavows any political motive and affirms that its initiative is not directed against anyone, the very existence of the new entity increases the options open to the regional states themselves.

The next steps in the Central Asia Plus Japan initiative remain undefined. It is likely that a meeting of senior officials will follow, and that

this would lead to further sessions at the ministerial level and possibly then to a meeting of heads of state.

With its new initiative, Japan has ratcheted up its engagement with Central Asia. By so doing, it implies that future discussions of the region's interests in such diverse areas as economic development, trade, security, environment, and regional cooperation will have to include Japan, as well as China, Russia, the United States, and Europe. The scale of its program will set the bar for other aspiring participants, including India, Korea, Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran.

The Central Asian ministers fully understand this. Acknowledging the benefits accruing from Japan's presence on the scene, they unanimously voted in support for Japan's inclusion as a permanent member of the UN's Security Council.

CONCLUSIONS: Japan's initiative fully harmonizes with US policy in the region and also that of the European Union. It represents a further step towards the development of what might be termed a "concert" of interested powers, i.e., an ever-expanding group of states that have significant interests in the region and believe they can best be protected by strengthening the region from within rather than from without. Such a "concert," if it develops further, will inevitably be built on the realization by outside powers that they all gain most by practicing mutual self-restraint rather than by seeking unilateral or bilateral advantage, let alone by seeking economic or geopolitical dominance.

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RUSSIAN MILITARY BASE IN TAJIKISTAN INAUGURATED

Hooman Peimani

Russian President Vladimir Putin on October 17 officially opened a Russian military base south of Dushanbe. The base, which houses 5000 military personnel mainly from the 201st Division of the Russian army, a special air unit and a military/technical complex, is Russia's second permanent base in Central Asia after the one inaugurated in Kyrgyzstan last year. Against a background of growing American military presence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, the new base demonstrated Russia's determination to reestablish its military influence in those regions of strategic importance for Russia. Among other objectives, the development meant to help Russia prevent domination by the United States of its neighboring regions and thus their degeneration into a military/security threat to Russia.

BACKGROUND: The Soviet Union's fall ended Russia's military presence in most of the Central Asian and Caucasian countries. Moscow maintained some of its bases in Georgia and Armenia, while keeping a small number of troops in the Central Asian countries, excluding Uzbekistan, to guard their international borders as their respective military forces in-formation were unable to perform the task. As a result, Russia ended up with a limited degree of military presence in its former Asian republics in the early 1990s. Such presence decreased over time as most of them established their own border guards who eventually substituted their Russian counterparts.

Thus, in 2003, the presence of the Russian military in Central Asia at a significant scale was confined mainly to its 201st Division in Tajikistan. The Tajik government allowed it to remain in its territory as a force to count on in case of a new round of civil war and as a deterrent to any military adventure by neighbouring Uzbekistan, added to its patrolling of Tajikistan's border with unstable Afghanistan. In the Caucasus, apart from Russia's secured base in Armenia, a country preserving strong ties with Russia for various political, economic and military/security

reasons, the fate of the three Russian military bases in Georgia after the closure of one are uncertain. Tbilisi's insistence on their closure, which has continued to this date, was, and still is, a source of tension in Georgian-Russian relations.

Briefly, while Russia was facing a sharp decline in its military presence and influence in neighboring Central Asia and the Caucasus, the United States was experiencing the opposite. Added to its "temporary" bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, its growing military ties with most of the regional states and their activity in NATO's Partnership for Peace Program, guaranteed Washington a degree of military presence of some form in all of them, excluding Turkmenistan. Georgia's availing an air base to the Americans for their operation in Iraq and its hosting of American military "advisers" allowed Washington to secure a military presence in ascendance in both the Caucasus and Central Asia.

IMPLICATIONS: Concerned about the military development in its vicinity, Russia's efforts to change the tide in Central Asia and the Caucasus have reflected in its attempts to resurrect the Collective Security Agreement, which involves Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus and Russia, as

well as in its efforts to strengthen the Shanghai Cooperation Organization consisting of the first-mentioned three states, Uzbekistan, China and Russia. Apart from selling arms to its former republics, Moscow has also sought to obtain bases in the countries appreciating the need for strong ties with Russia despite their friendly relations with the United States. Hence it opened its first permanent base in Kyrgyzstan in 2003 followed by the opening of the second one in Tajikistan a few days ago.

Being on an official visit to Tajikistan, on October 16 President Putin signed an agreement legalizing the status of the Russian military base during his meeting with Tajik President Imamali Rahmanov. He officially opened the base located south of Dushanbe on the following day, after paying a visit to the units of Russia's 201st Division stationed in Tajikistan. As the latter's personnel and equipment have been used for making the base operational, it is still unclear whether Moscow will keep that division as a separate entity. Being involved in a variety of activities, including guarding CIS international borders, it has been operating in Tajikistan since 1991.

As a means to help Russia restore its fading military influence in the "near abroad", the newly opened Russian base is a major development not only of importance to Russia, but also to Central Asia. Without a doubt, it will have a long-term impact on the military/security makeup of that region and, by default, on the United States, a non-regional power deeply involved in the oil-rich Caspian region neighboring a range of more or less active "troublemaking" regional powers (Iran, China and Russia) in the eyes of Washington. The opening of the base by the Russian president left no doubt about its importance for

Russia and the Russian military doctrine in the process of getting over the devastating shock of the Soviet Union's collapse. Being described by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov as a "necessity of the time", the opening of the Russian base in Tajikistan demonstrated the Russians' pursuit of a more assertive foreign policy towards the "near abroad" aimed at meeting the looming American Challenge.

CONCLUSIONS: Although Russia has had a military presence in Tajikistan since 1991, the new Russian permanent base is a major development for Russia and also Central Asia. Since 2001, Moscow has been especially concerned about the expanding American military influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus partly manifested in Washington's acquiring bases, an indicator of its long-term plan to stay in Russia's proximity. Being the second Russian base in Central Asia, the opening of the Russian base in Tajikistan demonstrated not just Moscow's success in securing a long-term foothold in that region, but its determination to deny the Americans a military monopoly there. Although various considerations, including political and economic ones, make a blatant and fierce military competition with Washington an imprudent, unwise and unattractive option for Moscow at the moment, the important interests at stake in Central Asia and the Caucasus as reflected in part in establishing the new base hints at Russia's heading towards that direction. After all, as it sees it, Moscow must meet the growing American military challenge before losing the game to the formidable challenger.

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ARE AFGHANISTAN'S ELECTIONS A WATERSHED?

Stephen Blank

For the last six months the air has been filled with dire warnings that Afghanistan's security situation was disintegrating, that the warlords were still entrenched, and that the Taliban were making a comeback because state-building and reconstruction were not taking place. NATO was not sending sufficient troops and those that were there would not leave Kabul. Therefore the elections were in danger. Yet despite all the alarms, the elections took place successfully. This must be recognized as a major American and to a lesser degree NATO victory as well as a victory for President Hamid Karzai. Yet at the same time, the significance and magnitude of this victory must not be allowed to induce an unmerited euphoria that causes us to downplay the serious challenges that await Karzai and his western allies in the wake of the election.

BACKGROUND: Many of the fears cited above remain valid, even if the conclusion they seemingly pointed to has not taken place. NATO still does not have enough troops outside of Kabul and members are stalling on effecting major command reforms that would unite this force with the American led force and thus ensure unity of command, as well as multiplying those forces' strike and peace support capabilities. There seems to be no good reason for this stalling and undoubtedly NATO secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer is tired of going around with a begging bowl, to use his words, to get members to contribute to a commitment which they freely made. Here Again France and Germany seem to have let anti-Americanism get in the way of a commitment to a cause that is entirely legitimate, regardless of what one thinks about Iraq. Second, it is true that not enough has been done to break the warlords' power in the provinces or to reduce the dependence upon opium as a fund-raising device for them and for Afghan farmers. But the warlords cannot be broken in the absence of sufficient troops to keep order and absent economic assistance to farmers so that they are not only physically secure against retaliation by warlords or terrorists, but also have viable economic alternatives to planting opium poppies. Thus the complaints of many observers that the international community has not done enough to

either build viable state structures or crucially to live up to the financial commitments made in 2001-02 at Bonn and Tokyo are entirely valid. Such commitments are meaningless except as feel good stories unless they are actually applied to the crises at hand, state-building and agricultural dependence upon drugs. These funds also could go a long way to helping to rebuild infrastructure so that Afghans could begin to take part in international trade with their neighbors and stimulate investment and an overall influx of capital and skills into the country. Third, the American strategy that had stood aloof from nation-building in 2002 has been gradually and successfully revised and has played no small part in the elections' success. U.S. forces are going after the Taliban in the South and East of Afghanistan, not by accident the areas of Pushtun concentration. Not only do such attacks enhance security, they apparently have substantially weakened the Taliban to the point where they could not launch major disruptions of the elections or launch major military campaigns against the forces opposed to them. This pressure must continue and it should be augmented by the greater contribution of NATO troops and with continuing pressure on Pakistan to strike at Al-Qaeda and its allies in the Pakistani border areas adjacent to Afghanistan, as it has done recently.

IMPLICATIONS: But beyond those activities, priority must be assigned to creating a national Afghan army that is both capable and loyal to the state rather than to warlords. Only 8,000 men have been trained so far, and after three years, that is not enough. Raising a national army and the means to support it through economic growth that accrues to citizens and to the state rather than to warlords is essential if Afghanistan is to survive as a viable state and not return to being a war zone and playground for terrorists. It is also not coincidental in this context that the creation of standing armies loyal to the state which could defend it against threats from within and without, and the concomitant creation of a national economy under state rule were the fundamental

bases for European state building in the past. Supported by his allies, Karzai must deliver on these tasks to ensure the demise of the warlords or at least their substantial weakening while helping to grow the economy.

This task is beyond his capabilities alone, but since NATO has stated that Afghanistan is its number one priority and the American strategy has effectively, if somewhat belatedly, acknowledged the importance of state building, there are cautious grounds for hope. These grounds for hope are buttressed by the Afghan people's embracement of the fact that their government must be elected to be legitimate. This is a major though clearly incomplete step toward democratic government. If this government cannot deliver on security and growth, or if warlords and foreign governments are able to resume their habit of degrading Afghanistan's integrity and sovereignty, then these elections will not serve as a basis for further progress. Thus for these elections to really signify lasting progress on the road to democratic governance, state building along the lines sketched out here must be priorities of Karzai government and his allies.

Although, many of the past warnings turned out to be mistaken in their conclusions, they were

accurate in pointing to the abiding threats that could still undo or stop the progress that has been made since 2001. NATO and the United States, as well as other allies in the campaign to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban and secure it against future threats must implement the promises they have made. They must be willing to commit tangible, real resources, i.e. men and monies, to the reconstruction of Afghanistan's state and economy and to the creation of national institutions like a flourishing government and viable army.

CONCLUSIONS: While it is too much to expect that all those who have habitually participated in the old or new great games around Afghanistan will simply retire from the field, it is possible under the leadership of America and NATO to induce them to see their interests in a broader and newer light. It is possible that they now see the value and urgency of a stable, secure Afghanistan which can stand on its own and not be plaything of external forces which can only be ousted by war. Naturally, in such a case they may have to sacrifice some of their interest, but they will also receive in return the much greater gain of security for their peoples and frontiers, a lasting diminution of the terrorist threat, and an opportunity to create a more durable and legitimate security order in this part of the world. The last generation of Afghan history conclusively shows that this foreign meddling ultimately leads nowhere and only creates a black hole that forces like Al-Qaeda can exploit to everyone's disadvantage. Sacrificing capabilities that can not be sustained or that lead to no profitable end in order to eliminate that threat can only be a boon to everyone concerned, not just the Afghan people.

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BTC ENTERS THE FINAL STAGE AS AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA CONNECT THE PIPELINE AT THE BORDER

Fariz Ismailzade

On September 16, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and his Georgian counterpart Mikhail Saakashvili marked the ceremony of connecting the Azerbaijani and Georgian sections of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Main oil Export pipeline at the border of the two countries. The symbolic ceremony was an important indication to the international community that in spite of political risks and obstacles, the BTC project has become a reality and entered the final stage of its construction.

The special representative of the US State Department for the Caspian region ambassador Steven Mann also took part in the event and said in his speech, "We knew that the pipeline project would be realized. Many people doubted the realization of the project. I hope they have changed their mind. The project will be completely realized in a few months. This is a wonderful project for Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia. The United States is proud of supporting the project."

Speaking at the ceremony, head of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Natic Aliyev noted that more than 80% of the pipeline in Azerbaijan has already been laid and that more than 70% of that is already underground. Due to security reasons, BTC is being buried under the ground. The 1740 km-long and almost \$3 billion BTC pipeline is supposed to be completed in early 2005 to carry so-called "main oil" from Azerbaijan's Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) oil fields to Ceyhan, the Turkish port in the Mediterranean sea. ACG reserves are estimated at 4.3 billion barrels, and operated by a BP-led consortium of foreign oil companies. It will have the capacity of exporting up to 1 million barrels of oil per day.

According to the intergovernmental agreement between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, different companies are responsible for

construction works in each of the three host countries. In Azerbaijan, BTC's construction was undertaken by the Greek company CCIC. Despite the fact that the length of the pipeline through Georgian territory is less than that in Azerbaijani territory, construction works in Georgia lag behind the schedule due to a month-long stop in the construction works a few months ago. Georgian President Saakashvili ordered to freeze the construction works, citing the concerns of the Georgian government about environmental security around the pipeline, specifically in the area of Borjomi, known for its valuable mineral springs. Political analysts labeled this decision as a gamble to either extract more financial gains from BP or to pressure the United States over the resolution of the South Ossetian conflict.

BTC's entry into the final stage of the completion is a major victory for its supporters, including the U.S. administration and a blow to those political forces that were against it and called it "economically non-profitable and politically dead." With oil prices high as never before, Caspian oil will continue to play a major role in diversifying the energy supply of the United States and Western Europe. After the completion of the BTC, the construction of the South Caucasian Gas Pipeline, to run parallel to BTC up to Erzurum in eastern Turkey, will be launched.

At the same time, with the near completion of the pipeline, the issue of its security is also high on the agenda. Azerbaijan has experienced problems with terrorism since its independence. Buses, the Baku metro, apartments and oil pipelines have been targeted on several occasions – a total of 32 terror acts have taken place in the country since independence. Different criminal and political groups have

used terrorism to achieve their goals. Such international terror groups as the PKK and Al-Qaeda have threatened the destruction of oil pipelines, should their political demands not be met. The PKK even threatened to blow up the BTC pipeline. Besides, the ongoing territorial dispute with Armenia, the possibility of the resumption of military activities in Nagorno-Karabakh – just 30 km away from the BTC pipeline – further increases the risk of the pipeline. Speaking at the Azerbaijani-Georgian border, Ambassador Mann once again noted the importance of BTC's security. "Security of the

pipeline is a serious problem. We seriously approach this issue. Both the consortium and the countries must work seriously on this issue," he said.

Some media outlets and political analysts in Azerbaijan speculated that the security of BTC might become a good excuse for the U.S. to bring in troops or bases into Azerbaijan. The possibility of U.S. military bases in Azerbaijan was met with anger and frustration from Iran and Russia, who have lately used harsh rhetoric to pressure official Baku.

AFGHANISTAN CHOOSES NEW PRESIDENT AMID CONTROVERSY

Daan van der Schriek

On Saturday, October 9, Afghanistan held its first-ever direct presidential elections. Voter turnout was reported to be high all over the country and fears of attacks by the Taliban on Election Day did not materialize. Observers were on the whole satisfied with the process and called it "fairly democratic." But the 15 presidential rivals to the incumbent Hamid Karzai believed the initial failure to use indelible ink to mark voters with – preventing them from voting more than once – had caused massive fraud and they therefore decided to boycott the ballot and not to recognize the outcome of the vote. Quickly, however, some of Karzai's main contenders left this boycott again – perhaps to receive high-ranking posts in the new cabinet.

The cold haze from a dust storm the night before that enveloped the streets of Kabul on Election Day at first kept voters away from the polling stations. But as the day grew warmer, and anticipated attacks by insurgents on voters and voting precincts did not occur, more and more people came to cast their ballots – and not just in Kabul. Reports said that all over the country, many people showed up to vote. This

could have made the results of the elections an unquestionable success and provide the necessary legitimacy to the country's new president. But bad organization gave the opposition a chance to question the results.

The possibility of multiple voting was something election officials had anticipated from the outset. During the process of voter registration, in the weeks before the ballot, it became apparent that many people had managed to obtain more than one voting card. It is not certain whether this had been done with the purpose in mind to manipulate the outcome of the elections; according to some rumors, cards could be exchanged for food or health care. Weak voter awareness, no doubt partly because few candidates did much campaigning or explained things other than telling people they should vote for them might have been to blame for this.

Marking the finger tips of voters with indelible ink should in any case have prevented people from voting more than once. But on the day of voting, election officials initially either lacked this indelible ink or mistakenly used the wrong marker – with erasable ink – for the purpose.

The fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) that had 2,300 observers in the field blamed this on bad organization and insufficient training of election officials, but it believed the problem didn't result in massive fraud and called the elections "fairly democratic." The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) came to the same conclusion.

Some problems, such as election officials ordering people how to vote at some precincts, voters being turned away at others because boxes were full and campaigning ongoing within yet some other polling stations were nevertheless observed. But it should be noted that, with a total of less than 3,000 election observers, rather few of the 22,000 voting precincts can have been monitored.

And Karzai's 15 contenders did believe that massive fraud had taken place because of the ink failure and, halfway through the vote, decided to boycott the elections and not to recognize the result. Karzai's main contender, former education Minister Yunus Qanuni, did not even cast his vote. The boycott could have seriously undermined the legitimacy of the winner – although some observers believed the opposition instigated the boycott to prevent a loss of face that would result from their near-certain loss from Karzai. Whatever the truth of this, gaining legitimacy for the country's new leader was precisely one of the main objects the elections should aim for, according to the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). "Elections need to be perceived as legitimate by the majority of ordinary Afghans and the next president not only needs to win the majority of votes but

fulfill the high expectations that Afghans have about these elections bringing positive changes in their lives," says Thomas Muller, AREU's communications manager.

And Afghanistan's next president is likely to be Karzai: an exit poll conducted by the US International Republican Institute (IRI) that said it had interviewed more than 10,000 voters across Afghanistan, showed him already with a clear victory. Final results of the vote are not expected before the end of the month. Karzai wasn't happy with the boycott. "Who is more important, these 15 candidates, or the millions of people who turned out today to vote?" he said.

The OSCE was also unhappy with the boycott. "The candidates' demand to nullify the election is unjustified and would not do service to the people of Afghanistan," said the head of the OSCE mission to Afghanistan, Robert Barry. But as unexpected as the boycott appeared, it started crumbling again. On Monday, after talks with Western and United Nations diplomats, Qanuni and another important presidential candidate, the leader of the Hazara ethnic group Mohammad Mohaqeq, decided to leave the boycott. They had been promised that a three-person independent panel would investigate the charges of irregularities on behalf of the UN.

"To respect the will of millions of Afghans and to go along with our national interests, I would accept the results of the election after the investigation," Qanuni, who is rumored to have been promised an important position in the next cabinet as a reward for leaving the boycott, said.

A BIG SHOW? THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR IN SOUTH OSSETIA COMMENCES AMONG WIDESPREAD FEAR

Theresa Freese

The Beslan massacre in North Ossetia in early September, which saw the death and injury of hundreds of people, mostly children, instills fear in Georgian and Ossetian families living in Georgian-controlled territories in South Ossetia. At the same time, the ongoing South Ossetia conflict provides them with many more reasons for concern, particularly as the winter months are rapidly approaching. Tamarasheni and Vanati villages, including the secondary schools, were the hardest hit by Ossetian forces during the conflict. Families here face the greatest challenges over the coming months. Many are reluctant to send their children back to school.

When Vanati Secondary School officially reopened on 20 September, Georgian and Russian peacekeepers brandished Kalashnikovs outside the school to protect children against Beslan-type events. A Russian BMP-1 armored infantry combat vehicle, stood ominously in the school yard. Local residents garnished the BMP with roses, symbolic not only of their hopes for peace but of the failed Rose Revolution, which the Georgian government had wished to witness in South Ossetia. As it turns out, families were not reassured by the military presence.

“Scared” was the only thing one Vanati student, aged 12, could say when asked how she felt about returning to school. “It’s all a big show!” “Tamriko Kristiashvili, a mother with two children studying at Tamarasheni Secondary School exclaimed on the first day of school. She felt the government was conducting an “official” school opening, in front of the media, in order to show both Ossetians and Georgians that the situation was under control. “There is no serious studying in this

environment. How can they study?” Indeed, after the Vanati School was “officially” opened by the governor, a priest, and teachers, and gifts of textbooks had been passed out, teachers quietly announced to each class that the school would remain closed until the following Monday “to complete reconstruction”. Teachers reported that approximately half of the students had not shown up for the opening ceremony.

In Tamarasheni, no classes were held on the first day either. Moreover, Tamarasheni teachers and parents were confused about where classes would be held once they commenced. Parents did not want children to study in the secondary school, which stands on the front-line with Tskhinvali, is surrounded by trenches, and was heavily shelled throughout the conflict. Families reported that daily shooting could be heard around the school. Finally, teachers decided to conduct classes in the neighboring kindergarten, also damaged from the conflict, but better sheltered from Tskhinvali by houses and trees. All over Georgia the first day of school had been postponed to coincide with the 20 September start date set by President Saakashvili for Georgian schools in South Ossetia—schools normally open on 1 September. Consequently, the local government was under great pressure to meet this date.

A main concern on families’ minds is how to survive the coming winter. Many houses are windowless; others have damaged roofs or gaping holes in their walls. Some are unlivable or entirely destroyed. Because of the summer conflict, families were not able to tend to their fields and conserve for the winter. Many will have to rely on humanitarian aid deliveries, and their primary concern is that heating fuel is

scarce. Families cannot go into the woods to cut down trees for the winter for fear of armed Ossetians attacking them, or stepping on landmines. Without heating, they don't see how they can remain in their homes.

Despite government promises since mid-August that the reconstruction funds would "soon arrive", Gela Zaziashvili, a deputy governor, explained that the money, amounting to approximately \$215,000, was not transferred to the local budget until 28 September. At the same time, there appears to be pressure for Georgian families to stay in South Ossetia. Zaziashvili said "the government must be sure the families don't use the money to buy houses elsewhere. If they leave these villages, Dmenisi villagers [from the local Ossetian village that allegedly shelled Vanati] will come to live here. These people must stay here to live."

"We should do something so the children do not leave. If we go, the Ossetians will take over the place," Julietta Khaduri, the Vanati school director, explained. The Tamarasheni school director, Liana Bortsuadze, remarked, "We will stay here to teach as long as there is one child coming.... We are here to keep the parents and children from leaving.... The children who studied here are now defending our villages. The students now studying here will be the next generation defending our villages."

All villagers do not share his point of view. According to the deputy director of Tamarasheni Secondary School "Everyone who

can is arranging to live elsewhere during the winter. Those who have second homes or can stay with relatives are doing so." According to school records, Tamarasheni Secondary School had 148 students initially registered for the school year, but by the end of the first week of classes only 108 remained registered. (The director noted that this was highly unusual and that no student had left the school in the course of the previous school year.) Teachers worry that more students will move if their families do not receive reconstruction assistance soon.

There are rumors that students from the conflict zone attempting to enter schools outside of South Ossetia, for instance in Gori or Tbilisi, are being turned away. Parents are concerned that the government is trying to prevent families from evacuating South Ossetia. In Tamarasheni, school teachers pointed out one student who was rejected from school in Gori. Nobody could explain why.

Meanwhile, Rustavi 2, a major pro-government media station on September 20 reported that Schools Re-open in South Ossetian Conflict Zone: "Studies have begun in all the schools in the South Ossetian conflict zone. The Didi and Patara Liakvi valleys are at a full peace.... Vanati was the hottest spot a short time ago. During the hostilities the building of the school was damaged considerably, however today over 120 students entered the newly-refurbished school." Clearly, the accusation that this is all "a big show" is plausible.

"AMERICAN THREAT" LOOMS OVER KAZAKH-IRANIAN TALKS

Marat Yermukanov

In the first half of October two important visits from Iran made newspaper headlines in Kazakhstan. Barely had Iranian trade minister Mohammad Shariatmadari wound up his two-day talks in Astana, the Kazakh capital was decked up for the arrival of the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran

Hasan Raukhani. Both guests were given a warm reception.

Iran is not a closed book for leaders of Kazakhstan. Economic and political links date long back, and this tradition of good relations is preserved to this day. In his first talks with the Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati in October

1996, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev characterized bilateral relations as “friendly”. However, this common diplomatic phraseology seems to be slightly overstated in the present context. The standoff between the United States and Iran, the clash of Russian and Iranian geopolitical interests in Central Asia and the gathering cloud around Caspian oil forces Kazakh diplomats to keep a reasonable distance in their dialogue with Teheran, which has become more unpredictable after the defeat of Taliban forces in Afghanistan and the Iraq war.

The Iranian trade minister Mohammad Shariatmadari who had intensive talks with Kazakh leaders on October 3-5 had every reason to be satisfied with his visit. The most visible outcome of his trip to Astana was Kazakhstan’s promise to ship 1 million tons of grain to Iran on a swap basis. This volume of grain is far less than Iran have hoped for. But Kazakhstan, which exports only slightly more than 4 million tons of wheat annually and barely covers its domestic consumption needs, cannot provide more. Iran’s steel imports from Kazakhstan are also rather modest. In 2002, Iranian trade officials expressed their readiness to import up to 3 million tons of grain and 2 million tons of steel from Kazakhstan. It now appears that Kazakhstan’s ailing agriculture and steel industry spinning out of government control will not be able to meet that target in coming years.

On the other hand, after the construction of the Aktau seaport on the Caspian sea, Kazakh crude oil shipments to northern Iranian refineries increased remarkably. Last year, daily oil supplies to Iran reached 50,000 barrels. The shortest route from Aktau seaport allows Kazakhstan to ship up to 2 million tons of crude by the end of this year. Since the processing costs of the oil from West Kazakhstan are high due to considerable sulfur content, the economic efficiency of oil imports for Iran is questionable. In their turn, Kazakh trade officials are not quite happy with imports from

Iran which mainly consists of products of textile industry, cooking oil, and fruits. Investment possibilities of Iranian companies are limited mainly to road construction and the agricultural sector. Chinese, western European and American companies have already carved out most lucrative niches in the oil and energy sector of Kazakhstan. However, trade relations between Kazakhstan and Iran have showed some positive signs in recent years. While in 2002 the trade volume between the two countries made up \$500 million, in the first half of 2004 this figure had already reached \$367.1 million.

Iran’s ambitions are not limited to expanding its trade and economic relations with Central Asian countries. Worried by the growing political and military influence of the United States in Uzbekistan and Afghanistan and the looming threat to its borders, Iran seeks closer political ties with Central Asian states. Some time ago Iranian leaders categorized Kazakhstan as its nearest partner in Central Asia. The statement sounds true, partly. On his visit to Astana the Secretary of Iran’s National Security Council Hasan Raukhani raised issues of fighting extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking as immediate threats to the stability in the region. His views were supported by Nursultan Nazarbayev. The sides also touched on Iraq and Afghanistan, somewhat ambiguously stating that Iran and Kazakhstan “pay respect to international treaties”. Hasan Raukhani made a transparent allusion to a growing American military threat and said that the states around the Caspian Sea should not let foreign armed forces penetrate the region.

Iran seeks to win over as many supporters as it can in Central Asia, not restricting its diplomatic maneuvers to bilateral relations. Part of these efforts is the planned summit of the Caspian basin states in Teheran. Although this idea, fumed by Hasan Raukhani, got verbal support from Kazakh officials political analysts warn of the pitfalls of getting too close to Iran. Murat Laumulin, an expert with the Institute

for Strategic Studies of Kazakhstan, believes that the escalation of the conflict between the United States and Iran and the involvement in the confrontation of the states where American military bases are deployed may destabilize the whole region. A clash of that scale will inevitably have far-reaching repercussions on Kazakhstan and affect its interests in the Caspian region.

NEWS DIGEST

CONCERN OVER HIZB UT-TAHRIR IN KYRGYZ CAPITAL

6 October

Petr Tiablin, head of the Internal Affairs Directorate in Bishkek, said on 6 October that the banned extremist group Hizb ut-Tahrir might have up to 10 underground cells in the Kyrgyz capital. The remarks came at a meeting in the office of Bishkek Mayor Medetbek Kerimkulov. For his part, Kerimkulov called on local authorities and the public to take part in the struggle against religious extremism. The report noted that Kyrgyz security services have observed a shift in Hizb ut-Tahrir's activities from the country's south to the north. (ITAR-TASS)

CHECHEN LEADER REJECTS PACE DOUBTS ABOUT HIS LEGITIMACY

7 October

Pro-Moscow Chechen leader Alu Alkhanov criticized the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on 7 October for its position on the political situation in Chechnya. "If you listen to European parliamentarians, it would appear that [Chechen President Aslan] Maskhadov, who plunged the people into war, is legitimate, while Alkhanov, who won a fair election, is not," Alkhanov told a news conference in Strasbourg. Earlier that day, PACE adopted a resolution criticizing the August presidential election in Chechnya for deviations from democratic norms. Deputies rejected a proposed Russian amendment recognizing Alkhanov's legitimacy. "I would like to find out and understand exactly what circumstances led to such wording, which in a veiled way rejects the choice of the Chechen people," Alkhanov said. (RIA-Novosti)

KYRGYZSTAN, U.S. AGREE NOT TO EXTRADITE TO CRIMINAL COURT

7 October

Kyrgyz State Secretary Osmonakun Ibraimov and U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Mark Grossman signed an accord in New York in late September agreeing not to hand over each other's citizens to the International Criminal Court without prior permission. In practical terms, the agreement means that the court will not have

jurisdiction over U.S. military personnel serving at the air base at Manas, Kyrgyzstan (unless they are charged with genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes). The United States has signed similar agreements with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. (RFE/RL)

TURKMEN TELEVISIONS BEGINS MULTILINGUAL BROADCASTS

8 October

Turkmenistan's fourth television channel has begun round-the-clock broadcasting in Turkmen, Arabic, Chinese, English, Farsi, French, and Russian. Programming will consist of 10-minute news segments on the hour interspersed with documentaries, talk shows, and films. The channel's purpose is "to disseminate truthful information about Turkmenistan." (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PACE DELEGATION ACCUSES RUSSIA OF SUPPORTING SEPARATISM

8 October

Moscow is unhappy with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE) decision to grant a Georgian proposal to include Russian-Georgian relations on the agenda of the current PACE session, Ekho Moskvyy and NTV reported on 7 October. Georgian parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze accused Russia during a PACE debate the same day of supporting separatism in Georgia's breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. "It is impossible to fight separatism in Chechnya and support it several kilometers from its border, in Georgia," Burdjanadze said. The head of Russia's PACE delegation and State Duma Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Konstantin Kosachev (Unified Russia) said Russia "opposes using the PACE podium as a place for settling accounts," RIA-Novosti reported. Kosachev added that he regrets that bilateral relations have been "narrowed to two issues: Abkhazia and South Ossetia." Aleksei Malashenko of the Moscow Carnegie Endowment said in "Novye izvestiya" of 6 October that "it is not PACE's role to be an arbiter in the post-Soviet space," adding, "within PACE, the discussion of Russian-Georgian relations represents an element of provocation." (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN POLL SHOWS MAJORITY FAVOR OPENING OF TURKISH BORDER

8 October

According to a public-opinion poll released on 7 October, a slight majority of residents of the Armenian capital Yerevan favor the opening of the Turkish-Armenian border, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. The survey of 650 Yerevan residents, conducted from 1-5 October by the independent Vox Populi polling organization, reported 57 percent in favor of an unconditional establishment of direct commercial links between Armenia and Turkey, with 33 percent of respondents opposed and another 10 percent undecided on the issue. The strongest political opponent to the unconditional opening of the border is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), a junior partner in the ruling coalition that fears a flood of cheap Turkish consumer goods into the Armenian market would weaken local manufacturers. The ARF holds that a full normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations is only possible after the Turkish recognition of the 1915 genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENTIAL AIDE RESIGNS

12 October

Grigori Marchenko told a news conference on 12 October in Almaty that Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has accepted his resignation from the position of presidential aide. Marchenko, who headed the National Bank of Kazakhstan from October 1999 to January 2004, said he intends to act as a consultant for potential partners and foreign investors to set up a large financial institution on the Kazakh market. Marchenko also offered critical observations. He called the appointment of Prime Minister Daniyal Akhmetov "a mistake." The sooner the mistake is corrected, "the better it will be," he said. Marchenko also said he takes a negative view of recent parliamentary elections. "They are calling the [parliamentary] elections a rehearsal for upcoming presidential elections," Marchenko said. "I feel that this was a very unsuccessful rehearsal." Claiming that serious violations marred the elections, Marchenko said he would have voted "against all." Marchenko will continue to advise President Nazarbaev in a freelance capacity. (Kazakhstan Today)

AZERBAIJANI NGO CALLS FOR CLOSURE OF RUSSIAN RADAR STATION

12 October

A movement has been established in Azerbaijan to lobby for the closure of the Gabala radar station. The movement has appealed to Azerbaijan's intelligentsia for support, arguing that the Azerbaijani Constitution precludes the location on Azerbaijani territory of foreign military bases and that Azerbaijan should refrain from defense cooperation with a country that is an ally of Armenia. The statement also reaffirms that the radar station poses an ecological threat and has triggered a steep rise in cancer and cardiac and dermatological diseases among the population of neighboring districts. Russian military spokesmen have repeatedly rejected such allegations. Russia and Azerbaijan signed an agreement in January 2002 permitting Russia to lease the facility for 10 years at an annual fee of \$7 million. (Turan)

RUSSIAN MUSLIMS SET UP ANTI-TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

12 October

Russia's Muslims have set up a Khak - Justice organization that will fight terrorism, extremism and ethnic hatred. "Muslims have set up their first terrorism fighting organization. In addition to speaking, and whatever is needed has been said, we must act against terrorism," Ismail-Khazrat Shangareyev, a cochairman of the Councils of Russia's Mufties and one of the organization's founders, told Interfax on Tuesday. "The organization's membership includes all sympathizers with the idea as well as Muslims. All of us want to stop the ongoing undeclared war," he said. "Young people who do not work and whose morality is not steady are likely to embrace extremism. We will preach goodness, help is tackling their problems, find them employment and housing," Shangareyev said. The organization's declaration at a news conference emphasized that "the organization will aid in every way consolidation of a multi-ethnic Russian state and not allow any foreign or domestic groups capitalize on ethnic or religious enmity." (Interfax)

U.S. AMBASSADOR LOOKS AHEAD TO KYRGYZ ELECTIONS

13 October

Stephen Young, U.S. ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, told a news conference in Bishkek on 13 October that Kyrgyzstan can set an example for Central Asia with October 2005 presidential elections. "It is Kyrgyzstan of all the Central Asian states that has the unique

chance to become a leader in the process of transferring power in a peaceful and democratic way," Young said. Expressing the hope that 2005 elections will be a "landmark in the history of Kyrgyzstan," Young stressed his belief that President Askar Akaev will honor his pledge not to seek another term in office. Turning to other issues, Young said the United States will fund a program to collect voters' fingerprints in order to prevent electoral fraud. He also noted that the United States does not plan to increase personnel at the U.S. air base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan. (akipress.org)

INGUSHETIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS APPEAL TO NORTH OSSETIAN COLLEAGUES

13 October

Deputies to Ingushetia's National Assembly adopted a formal appeal on 6 October to their North Ossetian counterparts in the aftermath of last month's hostage taking in the North Ossetian town of Beslan, ingushetiya.ru reported on 12 September. The appeal warns of a perceived concerted campaign by unidentified alien forces intent for various reasons on sowing interethnic discord across the North Caucasus. It calls for measures to promote tolerance and mutual understanding and to quash rumors intended to fuel mutual enmity or calls for revenge, or to brand an entire ethnic group responsible for crimes committed by a handful of its members. It also urges cooperation between the legislatures of the two republics in an attempt to resolve "all disputed issues," presumably meaning Ingushetia's territorial claim to North Ossetia's Prigorodnyi Raion and the fate of tens of thousands of Ingush who fled that district during the interethnic clashes in October 1992. (RFE/RL)

SENIOR ARMENIAN PARLIAMENTARIAN LAUDS COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S ASSESSMENT

13 October

Deputy parliament speaker Tigran Torosian hailed on 12 October as "unprecedented" the positive evaluation of developments in Armenia adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) during its fall session in Strasbourg last week, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. That evaluation noted that Armenian authorities have complied with the requirements of a resolution adopted by the PACE in late April, including releasing all individuals detained for their

participation in antigovernment demonstrations and lifting restrictions on such protests. Torosian also thanked opposition parliamentarians in the PACE delegation for refraining from publicly denouncing the Armenian authorities' human rights record. (RFE/RL)

CHECHEN SEPARATIST SUPPORTERS PICKET RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN ESTONIA

13 October

A picket was held in support of the Chechen separatists outside the Russian Embassy in Tallinn on Wednesday. The picketers carried posters reading "Freedom to Chechnya!" and "Stop the genocide in Chechnya!" They distributed leaflets calling for peace in Chechnya and an end to murders there. Sirja Kiin, an activist with the Peace to Chechnya movement, told reporters the picket was intended "to exert pressure on Russia to fulfill its international commitments, including the beginning of a peace process in Chechnya, which it promised when it entered the OSCE." Russia should begin talks with Chechen separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov, she said. "If it is true that Shamil Basayev was behind the act of terrorism in Beslan, he should be punished. But I have no evidence that the statement posted on the Internet belongs to him. I have reasons to doubt it," Kiin said. The first picket of the kind was held two weeks ago in Uppsala, Sweden, she said. Several other European cities have joined the movement, she said. "We plan to hold them every Wednesday. So far we have permission for three weeks, because city regulations do not allow issuing permits for a longer time, but we will be asking for a prolongation of the permit every time," Kiin said. (Interfax)

UK REMOVES UZBEKISTAN AMBASSADOR

14 October

The government has withdrawn Britain's ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, who has been an outspoken critic of the regime's human rights record. The Foreign Office has given no reason for its decision but it comes after a UK newspaper quoted Mr Murray making claims about the Uzbek authorities. The Financial Times said a confidential report he wrote claimed political prisoners are tortured for information. Mr Murray, 45, has been receiving medical treatment. A Foreign Office spokesman said: "It's now felt it's no longer possible Mr Murray can do his job effectively so he's been withdrawn." He denied the action was in response to the Financial Times story, which claimed Mr Murray alleged in a report to

the Foreign Office that MI6 used intelligence gained by torture, passed on by the CIA. This was strongly denied by the Foreign Office, who said intelligence agencies never used torture to obtain information or incited others to do so. His two years as ambassador have been controversial, beginning when he said: "Uzbekistan is not a functioning democracy, nor does it appear to be moving in the direction of democracy." This was at a time when Uzbekistan had become close to the United States and a US military base had opened there, so it caused political embarrassment. (BBC)

KAZAKH SECURITY HEAD CONFIRMS KAZAKH CITIZEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN TASHKENT BOMBING

14 October

Nartai Dutbaev, chairman of Kazakhstan's National Security Committee, has confirmed that a Kazakh citizen was one of the suicide bombers who took part in attacks in Tashkent on 30 July. In an interview published on 13 October, Dutbaev told Kazakhstan's "Liter" newspaper, "Askhan Shuyusupov, a Kazakh citizen and a resident of Taraz [in southern Kazakhstan], was directly involved in the terrorist attack in Tashkent. This is a proven fact. Unfortunately, our Uzbek colleagues told us about this too late." Dutbaev said that Kazakh specialists identified Shuyusupov's badly mangled corpse on the basis of fingerprints. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITIONISTS PREVENTED FROM MAKING FINAL COURT STATEMENT

14 October

Presiding judge Mansur Ibaev refused on 13 October to allow the seven oppositionists on trial for their alleged role in violent clashes in Baku between police and opposition supporters in the wake of the disputed October 2003 presidential ballot to make a final statement in their defense. Ibaev claimed the seven accused have no right to make such statements after their respective defense lawyers declined on 12 October to make a final speech for the defense on the grounds that they were "being subjected to physical and psychological pressure." People's Party Chairman Panakh Huseinov argued that the defendants have the right to a final address. Democratic Party of Azerbaijan Secretary-General Serdar Djalaloglu explained that "we want to try to prove to the public that we are not guilty of anything." The prosecution has called for prison terms of between four and seven years for all seven men. (zerkalo.az)

CONTROVERSIAL AZERBAIJANI CLERIC REFUSED PERMISSION TO TRAVEL ABROAD

14 October

Azerbaijani border guards refused on 13 October to permit Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, imam of the unregistered Djuma Mosque in Baku, to board a plane for Warsaw, where he hoped to attend to meeting convened by the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. It was the third time within two months that Ibrahimoglu has been prevented from leaving Azerbaijan. He told zerkalo.az that the authorities offered no explanation for their refusal to allow him to travel abroad. (zerkalo.az)

RUSSIA DETERMINED TO STRIKE TERRORISTS PREEMPTIVELY - IVANOV

14 October

Russia is determined to deliver preemptive strikes upon terrorist bases using all available weapons except nuclear ones, said Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. "We know their [terrorists'] names and know who stands behind them, and we will wipe this scum out in its dens or elsewhere, including by delivering preemptive strikes using all resources and potential we have, except, of course, nuclear weapons," Ivanov said in a report at an informal meeting between the Russian and NATO defense ministers in the Romanian town of Poiana Brasov. (Interfax)

RUSSIA SEEKS RESTORATION OF RAIL LINKS WITH SOUTH CAUCASUS

14 October

Visiting Yerevan on 13 October, Russian Transport Minister Igor Levitin pledged that the Russian government will do everything in its power to persuade neighboring Georgia and Azerbaijan to agree to the restoration of rail traffic between the Russian Federation and the South Caucasus, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Levitin criticized the Georgian leadership for its reluctance to allow rail traffic from Russia to transit the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia en route to Armenia. He said obstacles to the transportation of goods to and from Armenia negatively impact both the Armenian economy and Russian exports to and economic cooperation with that country. Restrictions on the passage of vehicles between Russia and Georgia imposed in the wake of September's Beslan hostage crisis have compounded Armenia's economic isolation. (RFE/RL)

RAMZAN KADYROV APPOINTED FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER OF CHECHNYA
15 October

Ramzan Kadyrov, son of the murdered Chechen leader Akhmad Kadyrov and key figure in the previous Chechen Cabinet, has been appointed first deputy prime minister of Chechnya. Chechen President Alu Alkhanov signed a decree to this end Friday morning. (Interfax)

RUSSIA UNYIELDING ON BORDER CLOSURE
15 October

Russian Transport Minister Igor Levitin said in the Armenian capital Yerevan on 14 October that Russia will keep its borders with Georgia and Azerbaijan closed for another 30-40 days until unspecified measures to preclude the infiltration of terrorists into the Russian Federation have been implemented, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. At the same time, Levitin hinted that the Verkhni Lars border crossing between Russia and Georgia could again be opened for a short period to enable vehicles bound for Armenia to cross from Russia into Georgia. That crossing was opened for several hours on 10 October to permit traffic bound for Armenia to enter Georgia. In an implicit rejection of official Armenian requests that traffic bound for Armenia be allowed to pass freely through the Verkhni Lars border post, Levitin said an alternative route via the Caspian Sea and Iran would prove "faster and cheaper." Levitin held talks in Yerevan with Armenian President Robert Kocharian and Prime Minister Andranik Markarian and chaired jointly with Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian a session of the bilateral intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN OPPOSITION SETS UP COORDINATING COUNCIL
15 October

Opposition parties on Friday set up a council "to coordinate the actions of democratic forces in order to carry out political reforms in Kazakhstan and unify their efforts," one of the parties said on Friday. "The Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces of Kazakhstan, which has been set up at the initiative of the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, and the people's party Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, held its first organizational meeting in the city of Almaty on October 15, 2004," Ak Zhol said in a release. The

release described the council's main tasks. They are to enable parties, public associations, and public figures to pool their efforts to set up a coalition of "democratic forces," draw up a program for political reforms and hammer out a single platform for the December 2006 presidential election so that groups represented by the council can put forward a single candidate for president. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KAZAKH SUPREME COURT BANS FOUR TERROR GROUPS
15 October

In a closed session on 15 October, Kazakhstan's Supreme Court declared four groups terrorist organizations and banned their activities in the country. The groups are Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Party of Eastern Turkestan, the Kurdish National Congress, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The court ruled on the basis of an inquiry initiated by the Prosecutor-General's Office. The ruling did not mention Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is banned as an extremist organization in all neighboring Central Asian countries. Although the group is not expressly prohibited, Hizb ut-Tahrir is not registered in Kazakhstan, rendering any activities on its behalf illegal. (Kazakhstan Today)

CASPIAN PIPELINE 'UNITES NATIONS'
16 October

Two sections of an important pipeline due to bring Caspian oil to Western markets have been connected at a ceremony on the Azeri-Georgian border. Azeri President Ilham Aliyev said the project, due to be completed next year, would bring great financial wealth and boost regional security. The multi-billion dollar pipeline from Baku in Azerbaijan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan is backed by Washington. Russia has proposed an alternative route through its own territory. "The oil pipeline has united two brotherly nations," Mr Aliyev said at the opening ceremony on Saturday. "The whole region needs this pipeline." Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said that some forces had tried to stop the project but had failed. "I have no false illusions that this one pipe will be able to solve all our problems, but this is a start," he said. "This pipeline marks a major step toward the independence of both Georgia and Azerbaijan," he added. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline will run through Georgia to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean coast. The project, led by British oil giant BP with the support of the US government, covers 1,760 km (1,094 miles). (BBC)

CHECHEN EMISSARIES MAY HAVE FAKED ATTACKS ON THEMSELVES – RUSSIAN SECURITY SERVICE

16 October

Incidents that happened at the houses of Chechen separatist emissary Akhmed Zakayev and former Russian security officer Alexander Litvinenko could be their own attempts to attract attention to themselves, spokesman for the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Boris Labusov told Interfax on Saturday. The media reported that Molotov cocktails were thrown into Zaiayev's and Litvinenko's houses in the early hours of Friday. Litvinenko was quoted as saying that Russian special services might have had a hand in the incident. (Interfax)

RUSSIA SIGNS TAJIK MIGRANT DEAL

18 October

Russia and Tajikistan have signed an accord to make legal hundreds of thousands of Tajik migrants in Russia. The deal was part of a package of measures agreed between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Tajik counterpart, Emomali Rahmonov. The issue is of the utmost importance to Tajikistan. When attackers beat to death a nine-year-old Tajik girl in St Petersburg last winter, the case brought to light the size of the problem. Between 200,000 and a million migrants have made the long, hard journey, many with no proper papers, to find work in bazaars and on building sites. Most make it - their remittances may now be about equal to the national budget, supporting huge families and even whole villages. But life can be extremely harsh, and the Tajiks are constantly harassed by the authorities. Police in the Urals this week arrested more than 100 Tajik men in a funeral cortege. They had been going to bury the body of a friend who had died, they said, because no doctor would treat him. Under the new accord, all migrants will have legal status and medical insurance - both existing workers and those to come. The migrants have chosen Russia because it was the colonial power in Central Asia and many speak at least some Russian. Very few intend to remain, most returning after they have made enough to start a business at home. No intergovernmental agreement will solve all their problems, many of which are rooted in racist attitudes. But the document signed may make life much easier after the parliaments ratify the accord early next year. (BBC)

RUSSIA STRESSES TAJIK PRESENCE

18 October

Russia's President Putin, on a visit to Tajikistan, is meeting the presidents of Central Asia on Monday for talks. The visit is seen as a landmark, re-launching Russia's presence as a military power in Tajikistan. It has opened a new army base and formally taken over a space monitoring complex high in the Tajik mountains. For Russia, the base is a symbol of its new presence in Tajikistan. It will replace an old Soviet leftover, the garrison of the 201st Division. Once complete, the base is to house 5,000 soldiers and perhaps have air support. It is also to have formal control over a space monitoring centre, hidden away in the mountains and top secret for many years. The base is not designed to protect Russia's borders - it is 2,000km from Dushanbe to Moscow - but it does give Russia reach into Asia. Tajikistan sits between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan, while Uzbekistan lies to the west. Many Russians are disconcerted by the coming of the American military to Central Asia, an area they traditionally regard as their backyard. They see the Tajik base as a reassuring sign of Russia's sustained importance here. To underscore the occasion, Mr Putin is now to meet the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, who have flown to Dushanbe for a separate meeting of a group called the Central Asian Co-operation Organisation. Russia will now formally join the group, signalling its renewed commitment to this part of the world. (BBC)

PRO-MOSCOW CHECHEN LEADER CONDEMNS VIOLATIONS DURING SEARCH OPERATION

19 October

Pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Alu Alkhanov intervened last week to end a search operation in the village of Novye Atagi, south of Grozny, conducted by guardsmen loyal to First Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov. The village, which has a population of some 8,000, was cordoned off and every house was searched; all males between the age of 14 and 60 were herded together in a compound surrounded with barbed wire, and 10 of them were eventually arrested on unspecified charges. After three days, Alkhanov dispatched a team to assess the situation in Novye Atagi and condemned human right violations as likely to undercut the population's support for the pro-Russian Chechen leadership. Alkhanov's intervention may compound tensions between himself and Kadyrov, the second-most-powerful official in the pro-Moscow leadership. Some Russian observers have predicted that Kadyrov will

replace Alkhanov as leader in preterm elections in the fall of 2006 when Kadyrov turns 30. (RFE/RL)

TURKEY ALLOCATES \$2MLN FOR GEORGIAN ARMED FORCES

19 October

Turkey says it will allocate \$2 million for the logistical development in the Georgian armed forces. A corresponding protocol will be signed in Tbilisi on Tuesday, Georgian Defense Ministry press secretary Nino Sturua told Interfax. "Under the document, non-repayable material aid will be granted to the Defense Academy, the 11th Brigade, the Kojori Special Task Brigade, Marneuli airfield, the Maritime Defense Force, and the General Staff's Logistics Battalion," she said. (Interfax)

STATE TO SUPPRESS XENOPHOBIC OUTRAGES - PUTIN

19 October

Russian President Vladimir Putin told the second gathering of the All-Russian Azerbaijani Congress on Tuesday that xenophobia has become "a serious and painful problem." "Something is wrong here. Mistakes and faults plague our work. We must analyze the situation and respond to it firmly," he said. "The state policy is aimed at putting an end to any outrages of this kind consistently and resolutely," Putin said. Ethnic accord is a "major condition of existence for Russia," he said. (Interfax)

KAZAKH PARLIAMENT SPEAKER LABELED THE ELECTIONS A "FARCE"

19 October

The speaker of Kazakhstan's Parliament resigned on Monday, saying last month's election was manipulated. Zharmakhan Tuyakbai said he would leave the main pro-presidential Otan party and refuse to work as a lawmaker because of election law violations during the Sept. 19 vote, which U.S. and European observers said failed to meet democratic standards. "If the election law is violated, that means there is something wrong with society," Tuyakbai told a news conference in the Kazakh commercial capital, Almaty. "I don't see how it's possible for me to work in the new Parliament." The Otan party backs President Nursultan Nazarbayev, a former Communist boss who has drawn criticism in recent years for backtracking on democratic reforms that he allowed in the early 1990s. In a recent interview with an opposition newspaper, Tuyakbai labeled the elections a "farce." Opposition parties have also strongly criticized the vote, alleging election fraud by authorities. Oraz Zhandosov, co-chairman of the opposition party Ak Zhol, hailed Tuyakbai's decision as "an honest and brave civic position." "He saw lies and that the authorities were not making efforts to correct the situation during elections," Zhandosov said. The Otan party declined to comment on Tuyakbai's move. According to official vote results, Otan and other government-allied parties earned nine out of the 10 seats distributed among parties. Pro-government parties also grabbed most of the 67 directly elected seats in the lower chamber. No opposition candidate won a directly elected seat. (AP)

