

**Central Asia**

**Caucasus**

**ANALYST**

BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday, June 4, 2002

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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/June 4, 2002

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For the last 10 years, President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov became famous, among other extraordinary actions, by the announcement of a number of gas pipeline projects in every possible direction, which never materialized. After being subdued to Russian dominance because of a foreign-orchestrated assassination attempt, the Turkmen president came up with another pipeline project: Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan-Russia, in addition to already existing and operating 5 pipelines in the Northern direction. This raises questions as to the implications for Turkmenistan, but also regarding the developing international environment in Central Asia.

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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](http://www.cacianalyst.org)) and described below.

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### **Analytical Articles:**

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](mailto:svante.cornell@pcr.uu.se) and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

**Svante E. Cornell**, Editor  
Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst  
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute  
The Johns Hopkins University  
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies  
1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel. +1-202-663-7712; 1-202-663-7721  
Fax. +1-202-663-7785; 1-253-550-4390

## HIZB-UT-TAHRIR: MAKING INROADS INTO KAZAKHSTAN?

Mike Redman

*The Islamic radical party Hizb-ut-Tahrir has recently been issuing aggressive new statements throughout southern Kazakhstan, calling for jihad against the U.S. and Britain. In a clear attempt to make political gains from regional uneasiness about the recent war in Iraq, this propaganda offensive points to a deviation from the party's usual targets of criticism; secular regional governments and the state of Israel. While such propaganda is unlikely to find a receptive audience in Kazakhstan, the Kazakh government of Nursultan Nazarbayev will have to act wisely in stemming the potential influence of a party which has proved elsewhere to be capable of thriving amid rigid controls by the state.*

**BACKGROUND:** During the first week of April 2003, Kazakh authorities detained two members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the South of the country for allegedly distributing extremist leaflets, which called for a jihad against the U.S. and UK. The two arrested men are set to be charged under the country's laws on religious incitement and are likely to face a heavy penalty for their affiliation with the group. The leaflets were distributed widely in southern Kazakh areas of Kentau and Turkestan, and written in Kazakh. They specifically refer to the coalition war against Iraq and the conduct of American and British foreign policy in the Muslim world.

Banned in almost every Muslim country in the world, Hizb-ut-Tahrir was established in 1953 by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani Filastyni, a Palestinian radical activist and Sharia judge in the Jerusalem appeals court. Rejecting the legitimacy of secular government in the region, it calls for the creation of a caliphate throughout Central Asia, governed by the principles of Islam and ruled by Sharia law. It was under the guidance of Filastyni's successor, Abd al-Kadim Zallum, that the party stepped up its activities in former Soviet Central Asia. Today, Hizb-ut-Tahrir activity is focused in the Ferghana Valley, straddling the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The modern party's main activity in Central Asia is distributing leaflets, many including openly anti-Semitic proclamations or accusations. These leaflets are, as a rule, directly translated into Central Asian languages from identical proclamations distributed by its activists in the Middle East.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The party has traditionally had less success in spreading its Islamist message in Kazakhstan than it has in several other Central Asian countries. Islam is not as deeply rooted or widely practiced there and many of the economic grievances of its neighbours are not shared in the oil-bolstered economy of Kazakhstan. The group's support there has mainly been confined to the southern areas of Kentau, Turkestan, and Shymkent, where the wealth brought by the booming oil sector is yet have any real impact on the local population. It is thus unlikely that the dissemination of pamphlets by Hizb-ut-Tahrir will be able to capitalize on the county's economic and social conditions, not to mention unease about American foreign policy adventures in the Muslim world, to any great degree in the short term.

Witness, for example, the lack of any serious demonstrations in Kazakhstan against the war in Iraq, which were so much a feature elsewhere in region and in majority Islamic states. In the long-term, however, the unpopularity of the pro-government Spiritual Board for the Muslims of Kazakhstan could encourage the emergence of a politicized militant element. In light of the continuing allegations of presidential involvement in corruption scandals focusing on oil industry deals, it is also possible that influence could be gained amid popular disillusionment with President Nazarbayev's tenure. There are already indications of disillusionment among the country's elite. Indeed, it is in this context that recent indications have emerged pointing to an expansion of Hizb activism in southern Kazakhstan. Political commentator for Novoye Pokoleniya Andrei Gubenko suggests that the coincidence of difficult socio-economic conditions and the proximity of regional trouble spots, namely in Uzbekistan, could further allow Hizb-ut-Tahrir 'teachers' to spread their word in the south.

While Hizb-ut-Tahrir's ties to regional militant organizations such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) are opaque at best, any organized dissent represents a significant political threat to the increasingly authoritarian regime which governs Kazakhstan. Officially, Hizb-ut-Tahrir condemns the activities of the IMU and there have been reports of a Hizb-ut-Tahrir delegation dispatched to the Ferghana valley in order to dissuade them from their path of militarism. Such efforts are highly unlikely to persuade the Kazakh authorities that the group does not pose a threat to national security. It is this threat which is likely to prompt a harsh crackdown against suspected Islamists in Kazakhstan.

Since its emergence from the Soviet Union, neighbouring Uzbekistan has curtailed religious freedoms and conducted the arrests of thousands of suspected militants in response to the perceived threat from political Islam. Meanwhile, Tajik security officials have clamped down on religious expression in Soghd, in the Tajik portion of the Ferghana Valley, while Kyrgyz officials have taken similar steps. In November 2002, for instance, the Kyrgyz Islamic Ulema adopted a restrictive licensing system for religious publications. If Hizb-ut-Tahrir

is indeed escalating its activism in Kazakhstan, similar measures are likely to be introduced.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Those involved in Islamist movements in Central Asia are well accustomed to strict state control. Each member of a group or cell of five is given specific tasks to carry out every week by the group leader. They then report back on their tasks after completion. As a rule, the members of this party cell structure do not even know other members or their tasks. The party is then divided into *vilayats*, which may cover several countries. This allows for a resilient organisational structure, as is evidenced by the party's

continued presence in the Ferghana Valley despite years of state measures of control.

The Kazakh government's reliance on force to meet the challenge posed by Islamic radicals, as it has relied on it to deal with other forms of internal dissent, does not have good prospects for success. In order to stem the possible influence of groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the future, the Kazakh government will have to exercise a more cautious and subtle approach that it has heretofore been shown capable of.

**AUTHOR BIO:** Mike Redman is a Political Analyst with AKE group, inc.

## NEW ELECTION CODE PASSED IN AZERBAIJAN

*On May 27, the Azerbaijani parliament passed the law on the adoption of a new elections code, in its third and final reading, with a vote of 95 to 5. According to this document, the provisions of the Election Code (EC) touching upon the formation of election commissions at all levels would come into force after the new parliamentary elections in 2005.*

The law also stipulates the principles of forming election commissions within the transition period. The document is an altered version of the one proposed by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. In the modified version, the representation of the opposition in the election commissions was reduced.

The main contentious issues in the discussions on the Code were the composition of the election commissions and salaries of their members. Until 2005, the Central Election Commission (CEC) will consist of 15 members. 6 members will be MPs from the governing Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP), 3 MPs representing the parliamentary minority (Azerbaijan Popular Front Party, Party of Civil Solidarity and Communist Party). Three seats are given to MPs elected by one-mandated territories (independents, and members of smaller parties elected in single-member constituencies). The last three seats are given to the opposition parties "Musavat", AMIP, Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, and the Liberal party, i.e. those who more than 1 % of votes in the parliamentary elections in 2000, but not represented in parliament.

District election commissions will comprise 9 members. The governing party gets three seats, the opposition represented in parliament two, independent MPs and government-oriented parties two, and another two seats to opposition parties not represented in parliament. Local election commissions will consist of 6 members. The governing party gets three seats, while

opposition represented in parliament, independent MPs and government-oriented parties, and opposition parties not represented in parliament receive one seat each.

During the adoption of the EC, opposition MPs did not participate in the session of the Milli Mejlis. The Parliamentary opposition left parliament as a protest to what they termed insulting attacks against them from MPs of the parliamentary majority. Previously, opposition parties have criticized this model of forming election commissions, since authorities will practically have a qualified majority (2/3 of votes) in the election commissions. Another central issue is the salary for members of election commissions. The variant submitted to MPs suggested giving salary to members of election commissions during the entire period. But the government-oriented majority spoke against this initiative, due to the lack of budgetary resources.

The opposition came out resolutely to keep the salary issue. But the head of state supported the view of the majority, and now only the chairman and secretary of the election commissions will be receiving salary during the whole period of 5 years. Other members of election commissions will get salary only during the election period (3 months).

Despite the fact that Milli Mejlis has approved this draft law, the president of the country may reject it. Some observers think that the president will return the document to the parliament. It would happen, if the president has objections. In this case, by signing out this act during the set period of time, he can return it to Milli Mejlis with his amendments.

The opposition relies on strong reactions by international organizations. But it is better for the opposition to rely on themselves, according to political scientist Rasim Musabekov.

According to him, "everything will depend on meeting planned for June 3". He predicted that the president will approve the EC. He thinks that authorities can review this act under pressure for a series of reasons. If the meeting on June 3 turns out well and the opposition will be able to mobilize the electorate for protest on this day, and a tough reaction of the Council of Europe, OSCE and the U.S. materializes, the presidential administration would have to review the EC.

"The fact that this act was adopted without the opposition MPs from the Democratic Bloc- is a violation", according to Ali Kerimli, chairman of the Azerbaijan Popular front party (reformers). The leader of Democratic block reminded that the authorities have accepted an obligation to adopt the law on elections based on consensus with the opposition. The adopted document contradicts the obligations of Azerbaijan before the Council of Europe. In June, during the summer session of PACE, the authorities will be criticized. Moreover, if this act comes into force, the situation in the country will deteriorate. The authorities have changed the sense of the proposals of the Venice commission".

Apart from the opposition MPs, the reaction of the head of the Baku office of the OSCE, ambassador Peter Burkhard was more optimistic. I observed the process and I think the EC draft now contains most recommendations. I am glad that this document was finally adopted. Now I can't give a final appraisal to this law – that is the prerogative of international experts. The official appraisal will appear after the president will sign the document".

**Gulnara Ismailova**

## TURKMENISTAN RECONSIDERS RELATIONS WITH UZBEKISTAN

Hooman Peimani

*Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov praised Turkmenistan's relations with Uzbekistan in mid-May less than six months after the Uzbek ambassador was declared persona non grata. He was subsequently forced to leave Ashgabad as he was accused of involvement in a November 2002 assassination attempt against Niyazov. The Turkmen authorities described the assassination attempt as a failed coup. As evident in Niyazov's remark, the sudden change of attitude towards Uzbekistan indicates Ashgabad's efforts to break its mainly self-imposed isolation. Abrupt changes in its policies, such as its May decision to withdraw from the dual-citizenship agreement with Russia, have worsened this situation.*

**BACKGROUND.** Relations between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have at times been far from friendly and tension-free since their independence in 1991. Various factors have contributed to this situation, including border disputes, a major source of tension in the bilateral relations of all the Central Asian countries. Thanks to the Soviet division of Central Asia into five ethnically-based republics without regard to the historical and ethnic realities, the two neighboring countries have disputes over certain regions.

The resulting existence of large ethnic minorities in the two countries (e.g., 800,000 Turkmens in Uzbekistan) has created grounds for ethnic problems, another contributing factor to tension in their bilateral relations. In this regard, their nationalist policies towards their respective ethnic minorities have been mainly responsible. In the post-Soviet era, both countries have sought to promote their own respective languages and to elevate the status of their own ethnic kin. As a result, the Turkmen minority of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek minority of Turkmenistan have been subjected to intentional and unintentional discriminations. This situation has created grounds for conflict between the two countries, which seek to end the mistreatment of their ethnic kin.

A major-shared problem in both countries has been education of the minorities in their mother tongues. Owing to various obstacles to good quality educational opportunity for the minorities in both countries, their ethnic minorities face difficulties in learning their own ethnic languages and Russian. Moreover, they have limited knowledge of the dominant language of their country thanks to a poor funding of the schools used by such minorities. Poor education and a lack of fluency in the dominant language and Russian, which are the languages of higher education, sharply decrease their chance of entering post-secondary institutions. Consequently, they have found themselves in a gradual process of exclusion from the job market for well-paid and promising positions. Thus, the Uzbek minority in Turkmenistan and the Turkmen minority in Uzbekistan have experienced a steady social and economic decline.

**IMPLICATIONS.** Within this context, certain factors have worsened Turkmenistan's ties with Uzbekistan. Like just about all other Central Asians, the Turkmens have been concerned about Uzbekistan's efforts to establish itself as the

dominant power in Central Asia. However, this broad concern turned into a concrete fear in November 2002 as a result of an unsuccessful assassination attempt on President Niyazov, which the Turkmen government interpreted as part of a coup attempt. In its aftermath, the president accused Uzbekistan's ambassador in Ashgabat, Abdurashid Kadyrov, of assisting a leader of the alleged coup, Boris Shikhmuradov. This accusation severely damaged Turkmen-Uzbek relations and forced the Uzbek ambassador to leave for Uzbekistan. In the following days, the Turkmen authorities forcibly relocated ethnic Uzbeks living near Turkmenistan's border with Uzbekistan.

Turkmenistan has become an isolated country by choice. The ruling elite has reestablished a Soviet style political system, which has sought to minimize the contact of Turkmens with foreigners. The Turkmen government has limited its foreign relations with a small number of countries necessary for its survival. As a country without a direct access to international trade routes, Turkmenistan has to rely on its neighbors or certain countries in its proximity through which it conducts its international trade. For that reason, the Turkmens have maintained good relations with Iran and Russia, while having troubled relations with other regional countries such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan has been a target of a growing international criticism for abuses of human rights, a problem endemic in all the Central Asian countries to a varying extent. Being isolated internationally, the Turkmen regime is now facing dissidents at home. Moreover, the purging of the civil servants and military personnel, which has been a feature of the Turkmen political system since independence, has become more extensive in the post-assassination era. This phenomenon has weakened the ruling elite and made it more vulnerable and sensitive to internal and external threats.

In such a situation, stable and reliable ties with neighboring Iran, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan have become especially important for the Turkmen government. Added to the mentioned reasons, this is a result of self-inflicted damage on its relations with Russia as it decided in May to withdraw from the dual-citizenship agreement with Russia. That agreement helped address concerns among the ethnic Russian minority of Turkmenistan who maintained their Russian citizenship while having Turkmen nationality. The

agreement therefore created an incentive for many of them to stay in Turkmenistan in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, when most ethnic Russians of Central Asia left for Russia. The May decision created a panic among the dual citizens who tried to leave the country for Russia while they could.

Against this background, it is no wonder that President Niyazov sought to end hostility towards Uzbekistan. Attending an opening ceremony for a gas-production facility on May 13, the president stated "We have good relations with our neighbors: Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Iran". Putting Uzbekistan in the category of friends despite a history of conflict indicated that Turkmenistan could not afford hostile neighbors such as Uzbekistan, which has the largest and strongest regional army.

**CONCLUSIONS:** President Niyazov's hint at a desire to improve ties with Uzbekistan could potentially help the two

neighbors begin a new era in their bilateral relations. However, to be effective, that should go beyond friendly remarks to become a policy of the Turkmen government. Even with that condition in place, the success of such policy requires its continuity on the Turkmen side and a cooperative mood in Uzbekistan. There is not yet any strong indication to suggest that both countries are genuinely prepared to deal with their major sources of disputes as a prerequisite for durable peaceful relations. However, perhaps, the growing concern of the Turkmen and Uzbek governments about internal threats could create a strong incentive for them to seek to address their conflicts. After all, they cannot fight on two fronts.

**AUTHOR BIO.** Dr. Hooman Peimani works as an independent consultant with international organizations in Geneva and does research in International Relations.

## KYRGYZSTAN CLOSES BORDERS WITH CHINA

*The Kyrgyzstan government closed its borders with China to prevent the possible penetration of SARS into the country. The Kyrgyz authorities have heeded the request of the Health Care Minister, Mitalip Mamytov, who appealed to the Prime Minister to shut its borders with China. Earlier, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had done the same. Physicians say Kyrgyzstan has a damp, hot, subtropical climate, which means great conditions for the spread of SARS.*

Should that happen, the state budget cannot sustain the financial load of a struggle against the SARS epidemic. China has spent over 185 million dollars for this purpose. The Kyrgyz Health Care Ministry does not have any special equipment for atypical pneumonia diagnosis, it even experiences a scarcity of protective costumes for doctors.

For instance, as the principal state sanitary inspector Lyudmila Shteinke informed, hospitalization and treatment of each patient diseased with SARS costs 13,000 soms (about \$300). Moreover, large sums of money are needed to carry out diagnosis research, purchase test systems, and for sanitary and anti-epidemic measures in markets of Bishkek and other cities.

On the other hand, as some economists predict, closing borders will negatively influence Kyrgyzstan's economy as a whole. China is one of the biggest trade partners of the Kyrgyz Republic. Annual trade turnover between the two countries is about 160 million dollars. Almost all of Kyrgyzstan's markets deal with Chinese goods, which are in demand among local people with low and

average earnings, who make up the major part of the population.

Economic experts forecasted a significant rise in prices of Chinese goods in case the quarantine is delayed. So far, merchandise imported to Kyrgyzstan from neighboring states has already taken a jump of at least 10 percent. Osh regional customs specialists assume that, after closing the borders, the Kyrgyz state budget is to lose millions of soms.

However, the coordinator of the Kara-Suu market, the biggest Chinese goods wholesale and retail trade complex, Bazarbay Solpuev, is optimistic. "Who said that, after closing the borders, trade here freezes? Merchants bring goods from other neighboring countries, Russian products are also in popular demand. Local producers, too, have much things to propose consumers," he said.

The Kara-Suu market is the place where about 550 Chinese merchants, mainly Uyghurs from Xinjiang, work. They stayed in Kyrgyzstan with their families, and went on trading. Kyrgyz businessmen intensified their economic connections with the Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Iran. The demand for European goods, which are popular among Kyrgyz elite, grew slightly.

Closing the border with China has not brought an appreciable financial damage to local tourist firms either. As some tourism managers admitted, very few people depart for China, like any other Southeast Asian countries. The decrease of demand for tickets

to Thailand, Hong Kong, and Malaysia is caused by the SARS epidemic in those states and the season of abundant rains that have just started there.

However, Kyrgyz officials are worried that the SARS epidemic might also spoil the coming holiday season on Issyk-Kul lake. Rumors abound that several Kyrgyzstan citizens infected with SARS have already been put in the Republican infection hospital. However, the principal state sanitary inspector assures there has been no case of SARS registered in Kyrgyzstan, and she publicly refutes information about two SARS deaths in the country.

Nikolay Tanaev, Prime Minister, also denied reports of Kazakh and other foreign media about SARS diseased cases in Kyrgyzstan. He called it "black propaganda directed to foiling the coming tourist season on Issyk-Kul lake". "Such information is favorable for those countries, where tourists traditionally come from, in terms of developing their own tourist business," Nikolay Tanaev stated.

Just recently, the frontier points "Irkeshtam" and "Torugart" were opened for exports and imports only, on the condition of strict medical control. This helps, in some ways, to mitigate the negative economic influence of the SARS epidemic from Beijing on Kyrgyzstan and to prevent its penetration into the country.

**Aijan Baltabaeva**

## ***THE MOSCOW SUMMIT: TEMPERED HOPE FOR THE SCO***

***Matthew Oresman***

On May 28 and 29, the Heads of State of the Member Nations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) met in Moscow to transform the SCO from a mere talk shop to a “full-fledged” international organization. While it remains to be seen how long these new commitments will last, the SCO has received a new infusion of life that should allow it to develop rapidly in the short-term. Still many questions remain about the true intentions of the individual SCO members and what role the organization will play in the rapidly changing strategic environment of Central Asia and the balance-of-power diplomacy of China, Russia, and the United States.

**BACKGROUND:** The Shanghai Forum (as it was originally known before the addition of Uzbekistan in 2001) was founded in 1996 by China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan to simultaneously demarcate and demilitarize the new border between China and the new post-Soviet republics, as well as to introduce confidence-building measures. Since then, the organization has attempted to move beyond its *ad hoc* talk shop status to address new and pressing issues, particularly the continuing terrorist threat in the region and the need for economic integration. These plans have continuously faltered, especially the creation of an SCO counterterrorism center in Bishkek in 1999. The post-September 11 deployment of U.S. troops to the region derailed the organization even more, but China and, to some degree, Russia, serving as the inspiration for this group, could not be deterred. Now, in recent days, the world is finally seeing real resources being brought to bear for the SCO, including political capital meant to ensure the longevity of the organization: the organization’s charter has been finalized; a secretariat in Beijing has been established with Zhang Deguang, the current Chinese ambassador to Moscow, serving as its first Secretary General for a three year term; the Bishkek counterterrorism center has been given an executive board and a mandate to initiate database construction and information sharing – all of which is to be tested during an SCO-wide command post exercise in August 2003; agreements on law enforcement, counter-narcotics, highway construction, emergency disaster response, and border guard cooperation have all been worked on; and a new flag and logo have even been introduced.

**IMPLICATIONS:** This Moscow summit can be judged a major success, particularly for China, the organization’s main sponsor. In the wake of September 11, the SCO has had to continuously justify its existence given the fact that the United States achieved more of the member states’ security needs in five months than the SCO had in five years. However, many of the regional issues, ranging from terrorism to unfair trade policies, still endure and this

summit has committed China, Russia, and the Central Asian states to address them together in a practical format. It remains to be seen, though, how long this new pledge will last, something that can be judged in the early stages by how much of the \$4 million budget is actually raised, how it is spent, and how much responsibility and authority is given to the Secretary General, his staff, and the Bishkek center.

Moreover, great power rivalry remains a salient factor in Central Asia. Considering the SCO’s position supporting a multipolar world order (at the behest of China and Russia), the group can be seen as an attempt by Russia and, in particular, China to maintain their influence in Central Asia in the face of a growing U.S. role and as strategic lever in dealing with the United States on other issues of global import. Additionally, Russia has recently reinvigorated the Collective Security Treaty Organization (formerly the CST) and deployed forces to Kant Airbase outside Bishkek, just across town from the allied forces at Manas, a move more political than practical in nature. In Central Asia, though, there is a convergence of vital interest for China, Russia, and the United States as each nation seeks to eliminate the continuing threat of terrorism. There is plenty of room for cooperation. Competition does not have to be the norm, though the United States needs to keep a wary eye on China and Russia while they prove they have learned this lesson.

**CONCLUSION:** A new flag and logo do not an international organization make. The members of the SCO will have to commit even more resources, energy, and political capital to make this organization survive, a nearly unheard of feat in the short history of Central Asian multilateral endeavors. Still, the steps taken this last week show strong promise. There are three early tests that will help determine the long-term viability of the SCO. First is the formation of the Bishkek counterterrorism center and the August command staff exercise. To be at all useful, this center will have to effectively coordinate a response to a new terrorist insurgency, with special attention being paid to de-conflicting the role of China, Russia, and the



United States. This task becomes even more difficult if Uzbekistan opts out of the exercise, since the Ferghana Valley is the most likely location of the next flare up. This center should not be expected to house a new rapid reaction force, but it has to be more than an information clearinghouse if the SCO expects to be respected a player on regional security issues. Secondly, the establishment of a permanent secretariat and budget mechanism by January 2004 will demonstrate the political and material commitment that member nations are willing to provide. A functioning budget and empowered international bureaucracy are central to the success of any international organization; particularly one bringing together states with inherent nationalist tendencies. Lastly, the SCO needs to prove that it can accomplish initial limited economic cooperation, a point stressed with unusual frequency and detail at this last summit. If the SCO can commit to a transportation pact by next year's summit, it will have

proved that it is more than a talk shop and can actually achieve practical integration in a troubled region.

It is clear that the problems of Central Asia are region wide and cannot be solved by any state alone, but for one reason or another, the Central Asian regimes have continuously failed to accept this and continue to undermine their own best interests. This most recent SCO summit offers a new hope to the region and the rest of the world, unless interstate conflict, great power balancing, or the misguided agenda of any one member derail the SCO's potential.

**AUTHOR BIO:** Matthew Oresman is a researcher with the Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. In mid-Summer, the Freeman Chair will release its report on "China's Emergence in Central Asia: Security, Diplomatic, and Economic Interests."

## TURKMENISTAN: IMPLICATIONS OF DUAL CITIZENSHIP TERMINATION

*President Niyazov's latest decree of April 22, 2003 stipulated the complete cancellation of dual citizenship between Turkmenistan and Russia, and put an end to the ongoing confusion over citizens' travels to Russia. However, this decree keeps causing unexpected results by creating uneasiness within and consolidation of the opposition abroad.*

The decision of canceling dual citizenship was taken between Vladimir Putin and Saparmurad Niyazov in their bilateral meeting in Moscow on April 10-12, 2003. Upon this agreement, Turkmenistan has been making new changes to take absolute hold of citizens who possessed the status of double citizenship. Within this context, tickets are not being sold at the airport for dual citizens without the official permission of Turkmen authorities. "Now it became almost impossible for me to visit my Russian relatives in Moscow," claims an elderly woman from Dashoguz region. In this case, two flights of Ashgabat-Moscow-Ashgabat out of seven routes per week have already been cancelled. Turkmen airlines explain the case with the lack of passengers flying to Russia. In addition, a weekly flight Ashgabat-Tashkent has also been closed down. But one may question the cancellation of flights, as it takes over two or sometimes even more than three months to get an exit visa from state authorities. Ethnic Russians who are about 100,000 all throughout Turkmenistan face a difficult choice after all. According to Turkmenbashi's decree, they have almost a month left to choose their citizenship, otherwise they automatically lose

their Russian citizenship and become Turkmen.

State borders with neighboring countries such as Uzbekistan are being strictly controlled to avoid the emigration of dual citizens to other countries. Those who want to escape from Turkmenistan through Uzbek borders are being caught and stopped by border guards unless they have an exit visa. But receiving this visa costs about \$100, which is accompanied by a time-consuming bureaucratic process. Within this context, Russia appears to be less worried about the human rights of ethnic Russians in Turkmenistan. Those Russians being in a volatile position consider themselves as being objects of a tradeoff for natural gas. Meanwhile, a Russian court declared an arrest warrant for Hudaiberdi Orazov, a former Head of the Central Bank of Turkmenistan who has been in exile in opposition against Niyazov's regime. At the same time, Murad Esenov on behalf of Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan addressed Boris Nemtsov, leader of Russia's liberal Union of Rightist Forces (SPS) party, to influence Turkmenistan's decision of terminating dual citizenship and protecting ethnic Russians' human rights and prisoners of conscience in Turkmenistan. By doing so, the Turkmen opposition in Moscow and Sweden try to gain support in the Russian Duma.

In addition to the uneasy situation of Russians within the country, the opposition abroad is consolidating, following the track of Turkmenbashi's idiosyncratic new policies. In

this context, leaving Turkmenistan due to the political regime seems to become common for Turkmen state officials. It is worth recalling that the Turkmen ambassador to Great Britain has recently asked for political asylum in Great Britain.

As the official website of Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan states, the released U.S. citizen L. Komarovsky after his release to the U.S. "declared war" on Niyazov through writing a book about the real life of the Turkmen nation and the political regime within the country. While answering the questions of journalists, Komarovsky asserts that he had been under various types of torture while being in custody in Turkmenistan. Meanwhile, the U.S. and E.U. are raising concern about the "inhumane treatment of prisoners in Turkmenistan, particularly the news last month of two death cases, of Murat Shikhmuradov, the nephew of ex-Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov, and former Deputy National Security Minister Hayyt Kakayev, who were recently reported dead in custody."

All in all, the termination of dual citizenship has developed both internal and external repercussions in Turkmenistan. Ethnic Russians are having a difficult time ever in Turkmenistan. As the international community pays a special attention to Turkmenistan, the opposition gains strength abroad.

**Chemen Durdiyeva**

## TURKMENBASHI'S GAS GAMES: GAS FOR POWER?

James Purcell Smith

*For the last 10 years, President of Turkmenistan Saparmurad Niyazov became famous, among other extraordinary actions, by the announcement of a number of gas pipeline projects in every possible direction, which never materialized. After being subdued to Russian dominance because of a foreign-orchestrated assassination attempt, the Turkmen president came up with another pipeline project: Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan-Russia, in addition to already existing and operating 5 pipelines in the Northern direction. This raises questions as to the implications for Turkmenistan, but also regarding the developing international environment in Central Asia.*

**BACKGROUND:** Since the early years of its independence, Turkmenistan's President Saparmurad Niyazov has been coming up with a number of gas pipeline projects, with the aim to boost its gas exports bypassing the Northern route through Russia. The Turkmen president spent days and weeks of talks with heads of states and other officials, discussing numerous gas pipeline projects. A shortlist includes the Turkmenistan-Iran-Turkey option, the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China-Japan, the Trans-Caspian Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey, and the last, widely discussed project, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan with possible extension to India. What Turkmen authorities succeeded to accomplish in this time is the construction of a single, 140 km (90 miles) long gas pipeline from Korpudzhe in southern Turkmenistan to Kurtkui in northern Iran with exports of ca. 4-5 billion cubic meters to Iran annually starting in 1998.

However, all other projects still remain at the stage of wishful thinking. According to most experts, the main reason is the unrealistic demands on the part of Turkmen authorities to the parties in the projects and the erratic behavior of the Turkmen president. During the 10 years since 1993, Russia succeeded in building the Blue Stream gas pipeline from southern Russia through the Black Sea to Turkey with an annual capacity of 16 billion cubic meters of gas. Iran completed a gas pipeline from Iran to Turkey and has been exporting gas to Turkey for the last two years. According to the agreement signed between Turkey and Iran, Tehran is intending to export more than 520 billion cubic meters of gas to its western neighbor during the upcoming twenty year period. And in this situation, Turkmen authorities are announcing another gas pipeline project Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan-Russia, after the strange and by all assessments foreign-orchestrated assassination attempt on Mr. Niyazov on November 25, 2002. The length of the pipeline is expected to be 1070 kilometers (670 miles) with a capacity of 30-40 billion cubic meters annually, and at a cost of over US\$1.2 billion.

It is necessary to consider that since the mid-1970s until the present, five different strategic gas pipeline go to Russia from Central Asia, carrying mainly Turkmen gas as well as small

volumes of Uzbek gas to its customers in Russia, the Ukraine, and partly to Georgia and Armenia.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Many experts have now been raising questions regarding the real motivations behind and the implications of another gas pipeline project to Russia from Turkmenistan. Is it a another dead-end pipe-dream of the ailing Turkmen president, or the ultimate prize of Turkmenistan's submission to foreign interests and another tool in a New Old Great Game? Experts believe that the volume of pipelines currently in operation, after minor repairs, can afford pumping almost 60 billion cubic meters of Turkmen and Uzbek gas via the northern route to Russia and the Ukraine. Turkmen gas is currently exported to Russia and the Ukraine at a price of \$42 per 1000 cubic meters, half of which is paid in currency, and half by highly overpriced commodities unmarketable on the international market. Ashgabat is also exporting another 5 billion cubic meters of gas to Iran, and the domestic consumption of Turkmenistan accounts for another 15 billion cubic meters. Altogether, this totals 80 billion cubic meters of gas annually. Western experts in the oil and gas industry of Central Asia believe that the aforementioned volume of gas extraction is close to the limit of the Turkmen gas industry's capacity. To extract an additional 30-40 billion cubic of gas, the Turkmen gas industry will require \$4-6 billion in investments. And with such figures, building another pipeline under these circumstances means a merely geopolitical investment, aimed at totally abolishing the hopes of all other customers to buy Turkmen gas in the foreseeable future.

Evidence to this effect were clear during Niyazov's recent trip to Moscow in April 2003. Mr. Niyazov signed a 25-year gas deal with Russia to export up to 2 trillion cubic meters of natural gas until 2028, at a price of \$44 per 1000 cubic meters, at the same conditions: 50% in cash, 50% in commodities. Given the current level of world gas prices at more than double what Turkmenistan will receive, the conclusion that comes to mind is not flattering: this was the ultimate prize that Mr. Niyazov was willing to pay to his masters for keeping himself in power in his desert country ravaged by mismanagement and the cult of personality. However, a dimension that Mr. Niyazov may not have

grasped is that this also means nobody in either the East or West any longer believe that he and his country is an independent political actor in the international arena. Clearly, this creates the risk that foreign actors will discuss important matters not with Turkmenistan but with his masters abroad.

**CONCLUSION:** The recent events in Turkmenistan and the new geopolitical equilibrium that this creates is clearly important to the West, and especially the United States. The U.S. claims its policy in Central Asia is not that of a "zero sum game" or a new round of the Old Great Game. However, it is faced by behavior by other regional powers that is reminiscent of just this type of politics. At present, other international actors in Central Asia do not seem to share and respect the principles of international conduct in

Central Asia and behave accordingly. The challenge this creates for U.S. thinking on the region is apparent. A failure to address this urgent challenge to regional stability and security will only increase the risk of new political adventures and undermine the shaky status quo of mutual political tolerance and stability in inter-state relations among countries of Central Asia. On another level, these recent development may have been intended to – and may contribute to – decreasing the opportunities and possibilities for regional cooperation between Central and South Asia, that emerged with the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the defeat of international terrorism in that country.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** James Purcell Smith is an expert on Russian and Eurasian Affairs, based in New York.

## AZERBAIJANI-IRANIAN RELATIONS ENDANGERED AFTER RUSSIAN PUBLICATION

*The already tense relations between Azerbaijan and Iran have again become the focus of this week's political agenda in the region after an article in the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta's* on May 29. In this article, the newspaper claimed that the U.S. Administration had already secured the Azerbaijani government's approval for the usage of the latter's territory for a possible attack on Iran.*

Azerbaijani officials were quick to refute these claims. "The information published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* about Baku's agreement to allow its territory for an attack on Iran is nonsense. The appearance of such kind of information in the Russian press is a political order of some interested circles", said Vilayet Guliyev, the Foreign Minister of the country. Novruz Mammadov, head of President's Office's International Relations Department made similar statements.

Yet these officials did not manage to suppress the increasing speculations in the local media. The majority of local analysts agree that the article has a provocative character and has been ordered by circles, interested in destabilizing the bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and its southern neighbor. Yet, there is no consensus on who these circles are. The political commentator of the independent daily *Echo* Nurani went even further in analyzing the situation, by stating that Iranian circles were behind the article. "These Iranian forces are using the media to send warnings to the Azerbaijani government", she said in a TV interview.

Others believe that Russians or Armenians were behind the article. In any case, some of

the political circles in Azerbaijan even responded positively to the news. These circles have long waited for an opportunity to punish Iran for its anti-Azerbaijani foreign policy. As expected, the Iranian government responded angrily to the Russian article. The Azerbaijani media even reported that some Iranian officials threatened Azerbaijan with war and the capture of Baku if the latter agrees to assist the Americans.

Iranian-Azerbaijani relations have been tense for over a decade, as both countries have a great level of distrust for each other. Although sharing the same Shi'a Muslim religion and a common history, Iran and Azerbaijan have been at odds for most of the 1990s. Azerbaijan accused its southern neighbor of planting an Islamic revolution in the country, oppressing its 25 million Azeri minority and helping Azerbaijan's archrival Armenia. Iran, in its turn, accuses Azerbaijan in helping Americans and Israelis to control the Caspian region.

The two countries are also at a disagreement over the ways to divide the Caspian sea, with Iran demanding a larger portion for itself. This dispute even resulted in a short military standoff in 2001. Only the Turkish military support for Azerbaijan calmed the Iranians down then.

Perhaps these tensions were the reasons for the appearance of the Russian article. It is widely known that Azerbaijan is a close ally of the U.S. in the war on terrorism. In his congratulatory letter to President Aliyev in connection with the May 28 Independence

Day, President Bush once again thanked Azerbaijan for its support in the war in Iraq. "Azerbaijan was one of the first countries to join the coalition and to agree to send peacekeeping forces to Iraq..." Bush said in the letter.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials are increasingly focusing on Iran. While in St. Petersburg, the U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice said "There is a danger of nuclear proliferation from Iran". Should the U.S. Administration decide to shift its focus from Iraq to Iran and demand from Iran to stop its nuclear programs, Azerbaijan will face a tough choice. In a possible U.S.-Iranian conflict, the factor of a 25 million-strong Azeri minority in Iran will also play a central role. The daily *Echo* reported on June 3 that political circles in Washington are actively engaged in a dialogue with Azeri dissidents in Iran, trying to unite the Iranian opposition. The Azeri minority in Iran, in its turn, might benefit from the situation by achieving greater autonomy from the Iranian regime.

The upcoming months will show whether the article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was a political trick or not. At the same time it is clear that the U.S. is paying increasing attention to the Iranian question and in this matter the role of Azerbaijan and the Azeri minority in Iran will be crucial. Yet all the involved sides will have to be double careful not to destabilize the political balance in the region.

**Fariz Ismailzade**

## NEWS BITES

### **GAS PIPELINE RECONSTRUCTION NEEDED FOR TURKMEN EXPORT BOOM BEGINS**

**21 May**

A Ukrainian contractor has begun a one-billion-dollar (900-million-euro) reconstruction of a natural gas pipeline that will help Turkmenistan boost its gas exports. Once reconstructed the currently disused pipeline, which skirts the Caspian Sea from Turkmenistan to Russia, "will have a capacity of between eight billion and 10 billion cubic metres annually," the *Neitralny Turkmenistan* daily said. The Ukrainian company Petrogasasia has started raising the pipeline on stilts across the entrance to the Gulf of Garabogaz, which lies between Turkmenistan's southern natural gas fields and its northern border with Kazakhstan, the newspaper said. Ukraine got involved when Turkmenistan signed a 25-year contract with Russian giant Gazprom agreeing to supply at least 60 billion cubic metres (2.1 trillion cubic feet) of natural gas a year until 2009, after which the volume will increase to between 70 and 80 billion cubic metres annually. Though much of the gas is likely to be exported to western European markets some will go to Ukraine, partly as payment for the reconstruction work. Russia is also expected to participate in the reconstruction and Russian payment for gas will partly be in the form of goods. Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic, possesses one of the top 12 natural gas reserves in the world but its only working pipelines are to Russia's Siberian region and to its southern neighbour Iran, neither of which is a big natural gas market. (AFP)

### **TOTAL, KAZAKHSTAN STATE OIL CO TALK NEW CASPIAN PROJECTS**

**21 May**

French oil giant Total SA (TOT) said Wednesday it started talks with Kazakhstan's state oil and gas company KazMunaiGaz (R.KMGZ) on the joint development of oil fields in the Caspian Sea. "We are looking closely at the possibility of developing reserves in the Kazakh sector of the Caspian Sea and plan to use all opportunities to enter into new Caspian projects," the agency quoted Total's general director Pascal Laluel as saying. By the end of this year Kazakhstan's government plans to sell licenses for up to 200 exploration blocks in the Kazakh part of the Caspian Sea and KazMunaiGaz has been granted a 50% stake in every new oil project. Total is already involved in one of the largest Caspian projects, Kashagan, where it increased its stake to 20.37% from 16.67% recently through a transaction with BG Group Plc. (Dow Jones)-

### **KYRGYZ SECURITY OFFICIAL SAYS UIGHUR SEPARATISTS MIGHT BE INVOLVED IN BOMBINGS**

**23 May**

First Deputy Chairman of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service Boris Poluektov told the lower house of parliament during its 23 May discussion of security that his service does not rule out the involvement of Uighur separatists and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the December 2002 bombing of a Bishkek

market, the May 2003 bombing of an exchange office in Osh, and an alleged attempt on the life of National Security Council Secretary Misir Ashyrkulov in September 2002. Poluektov asserted the service has determined that the two bombings were organized by IMU members financed from abroad. He said the bombers were closely linked with Uighur separatists and had received training in Chechnya. Poluektov repeated the frequently made government assertion that the extremist Muslim movement Hizb-ut-Tahrir is expanding its activities from southern into northern Kyrgyzstan, but he uncharacteristically acknowledged that the movement's ideology calls for the nonviolent creation of an Islamic state. (Interfax)

### **ARMENIA VOTES FOR NEW PARLIAMENT**

**25 May**

Armenia is holding elections for a new parliament, with more than 20 parties competing. International observers have said they fear a repetition of the alleged ballot-rigging which marred the presidential election won by Robert Kocharyan in March. But the elections look likely to be overshadowed by a constitutional referendum being held at the same time. Many Armenians say they have not seen the new constitution - and do not know what they are being asked to vote on. The parliamentary campaign did not generate much enthusiasm among the country's voters, who appear bewildered by the choice of parties and blocs. Armenians are being asked to endorse changes to 80% of the country's existing constitution, under which parliament provides genuine checks and balances to the power of the country's president. Armenia's opposition says that, if the new constitution is approved, parliament will become a rubber stamp. The president disagrees, and says the new constitution will help Armenia meet its international commitments to continue reform and protect human rights. But little effort has been made to give Armenians an idea of what they are voting on. Fewer than 9,000 copies of the new constitution have been printed. And instead of being distributed free of charge, they somehow ended up being sold on the streets. Preliminary results for both the elections and the constitutional vote are expected on Monday. (BBC)

### **TAJIKISTAN REDUCES NUMBER OF MILITARY OFFICERS TO BE TRAINED IN RUSSIA**

**26 May**

Tajikistan's Defense Ministry announced on 26 May that the number of Tajik officers to be sent to Russia for training this year is being reduced to 16. Previously, 100 Tajik officers were trained in Russia each year. The ministry was quoted as saying that the reason for the reduction was the increase in foreign offers of training for Tajik military personnel. This year, Tajik officer trainees will study in India, Iran, the United States, and Canada. Unlike Russia, these countries have offered to train Tajik officers free of charge. Thirty students of the Tajik Armed Forces Institute have already taken a course in mountain warfare in France, and the Tajik Defense Ministry is reportedly

considering sending military-school graduates to France for full-scale training starting next year. (Interfax)

### **UZBEKISTAN CLOSES MAIN BORDER CROSSING TO NORTHERN TAJIKISTAN**

**26 May**

Uzbekistan has closed its main western border crossing to northern Tajikistan's Sughd Oblast. The Tajik Border Protection Committee said the closure is intended to prevent the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The crossing point, named after the village of Navruzobod, is the main crossing for road traffic between Tashkent and Khujand. The Border Protection Committee noted that Uzbekistan has also closed border crossings to Kyrgyzstan, also to contain the SARS epidemic. No confirmed cases of SARS have been reported in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, or Uzbekistan. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

### **PRIME MINISTER CALLS FOR WIDER USE OF KAZAKH LANGUAGE**

**27 May**

Kazakhstan's Prime Minister Imanghaliy Tasmaghambetov told his cabinet on 27 May that the Kazakh language should be used more extensively within the government. The cabinet meeting was held in order for ministers to report on progress in implementing the law on the use of the state language within their ministries. Tasmaghambetov was quoted as calling for government officials to use Kazakh as much as possible in meetings and on public occasions. He dismissed complaints about a scarcity of Kazakh speakers and other excuses for continuing to conduct business in Russian. The same source asserted that, according to official data, 70 percent of military personnel now have a command of the Kazakh language, compared with only 5 percent in the early 1990s. But Tasmaghambetov complained that the administrations of only four of the country's 14 oblasts use Kazakh exclusively in conducting official business. The rest reportedly do their paperwork in Russian and then translate it into Kazakh. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

### **OSCE OFFICIAL RAISES EXIT-VISA ISSUE IN TURKMENISTAN**

**27 May**

OSCE Special Representative for Central Asia Martti Ahtisaari, a former president of Finland, raised the issue of Turkmenistan's restored exit-visa regime during a meeting in Ashgabat with Turkmen Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov and Mejlis (parliament) Chairman Ovezgeldi Ataev. Turkmenistan's requirement that citizens obtain exit visas to leave the country was dropped with great fanfare at the beginning of 2002, earning the country international approval for taking a step toward democratization. Meredov and Ataev told Ahtisaari that the exit-visa regime was restored in March 2003 in reaction to the alleged attempt to overthrow or assassinate President Niyazov. Ahtisaari responded that such measures require a broad dialogue with the population and the involvement of experts on international law, and as offering OSCE assistance in addressing the problem. (ITAR-TASS)

### **MOSCOW WILL NOT END NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH TEHRAN**

**28 May**

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said on 28 May that Russia has no intention of ending its nuclear-energy cooperation with Iran because such cooperation does not violate any international laws. Commenting on remarks by U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, who said on 27 May that the U.S. administration is urging Russia to end the program, Ivanov said that no one can find fault with Russia in this regard. Boucher's remarks were the administration's reaction to media reports that Tehran has secretly begun construction of two new nuclear facilities. The Atomic Energy Ministry, which is fulfilling an \$800 million contract to build a nuclear-power station in Bushehr, issued a statement on 28 May saying that it has no reason to think Tehran is in violation of international nonproliferation regulations and that it will continue with the Bushehr project. (Interfax)

### **RUSSIA SEEKS INQUIRY INTO EUROVISION VOTING**

**28 May**

State-run ORT television has filed an official request with the organizers of the Eurovision Song Contest seeking information about how the popular voting in the 24 May competition was tabulated. The Russian entry in the competition, the controversial duo t.A.T.u., finished third, just three points behind the winner, Turkish entrant Sertab Erener. Following the voting, Irish telecom operator Eircom released a statement saying that its tabulation of the voting results from Ireland did not correspond to the official results released by the Irish jury and that by its count t.A.T.u. came in first place in Ireland. As a result, ORT is seeking vote counts for Great Britain, the Netherlands, Malta, Sweden, and Norway directly from the telecom companies that coordinated the voting in those countries. (strana.ru)

### **ARMENIAN OPPOSITION REJECTS 'FALSIFIED' ELECTION RETURNS**

**28 May**

Leaders of the Artarutian election bloc told journalists in Yerevan on 27 May that they do not recognize the validity of official returns showing that Prime Minister Andranik Markarian's Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) polled the largest number of votes in the parliamentary elections two days earlier. People's Party of Armenia Chairman Stepan Demirchian told RFE/RL that "it's...obvious that the bloc's votes were reduced." In an allusion to the presidential poll earlier this year in which he lost in the second round to incumbent President Robert Kocharian, Demirchian added that "this was yet another disappointing and disgraceful election." National Democratic Union Chairman Vazgen Manukian, who similarly lost a disputed presidential runoff in 1996, said, "The elections were thoroughly falsified with the same techniques as in the past." He said he believes Artarutian should now campaign for the referendum of confidence in Kocharian proposed last month by Constitutional Court Chairman Gagik Harutiunian. (RFE/RL)

### **SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION HOLDS SUMMIT**

**29 May**

President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Hu Jintao, and the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan gathered in Moscow on 29 May for a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The summit approved the organization's budget, symbols, headquarters, and statutory documents enabling the SCO to function as a full-fledged international organization next year. Beijing was selected to host the SCO headquarters, and Bishkek will host its Regional Antiterrorism Center. Chinese Ambassador to Russia Zhang Deguang, who speaks fluent Russian, was named the SCO's first executive secretary. The organization is not directed against any other countries, but intends to address regional security issues, the fight against international terrorism, and common economic problems, presidential foreign-affairs adviser Sergei Prikhodko said. (Interfax)

### **SWISS NGO AND OSCE START LAND-MINE REMOVAL PROJECT IN TAJIKISTAN**

**29 May**

The Swiss Federation for Mine Action and the OSCE Center in Dushanbe have launched the first stage of a project to remove land mines in Tajikistan. OSCE Centre Head Marc Gilbert was quoted as saying that the OSCE and several East European countries are contributing 500,000 euros (\$595,000) to the project. Reportedly, 2 percent of Tajik territory -- 12,500 square kilometers -- needs to be inspected for minefields. According to the report, at least 16,000-17,000 land mines remain from the 1992-97 Tajik civil. The Uzbek military has also mined parts of its border with Tajikistan to prevent armed Islamic militants from crossing into Uzbekistan. (ITAR-TASS)

### **US PLAN FOR MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAN COMPLETE: RUSSIAN PRESS**

**29 May**

Washington has drawn up a plan for military action against Iran, which it accuses of supporting terrorism and having a secret nuclear weapons program, a Russian newspaper reported Thursday, citing diplomats. "The military action is designed to complete a popular uprising on which the Pentagon is counting," said Nezavisimaya Gazeta daily, adding that the operation's launch date would be decided at a meeting to be held Thursday in the White House. The action will be launched mainly from Iraq but military bases in the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan will also be used, the paper said. A deal has been struck between the US administration and Azerbaijani President Heidar Aliyev for American troops to deploy in the Caucasus state, it added. A top US defence official said Wednesday that there was "serious unhappiness" in the administration of President George W. Bush about Iran. It has charged that Iran has a secret nuclear weapons program and is trying to undermine the US presence in Iraq through support of hardline Shiite Muslim groups. Top US officials have also publicly accused Iran of doing too little to crack down on terrorists within its borders, including al-Qaeda members Washington has linked to May 12 suicide bombings in Riyadh. (AFP)

### **IRAN READY TO SMOOTH ROW IN ABKHAZIA**

**29 May**

Iran's ambassador to Georgia Hossein Aminian Tousi said here Monday that Iran is prepared to assist in resolving the Abkhazia

dispute in Georgia. He also declared Iran's full support for Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty, adding, "establishment of peace and security in the Caucasus is an Iran's important foreign policy priority." He said the upcoming visit by the Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze to Iran will help to further cement the already cordial ties as well as bolstering regional security. Abkhazia is a region located 180 km northeast of the capital Tbilisi and was granted an autonomous status as part of Georgia in the former Soviet Union. Following the break-up of the USSR in 1991 and Abkhazia's declared independence from Georgia, military clashes ensued between the republic and the government in Tbilisi ending in cessation of hostilities in 1993. Earlier in April Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi told Shevardnadze that security in southern Caucasus is of the utmost importance to the Islamic Republic. "Regional countries must play their role in guaranteeing security (in southern Caucasus) in order to achieve economic development," Kharrazi said. Southern Caucasus has been wracked by territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh as well as rebel insurgency, carried out from Panikisi Gorge in Georgia, drawing the country in one point to the brink of a military showdown with Russia. (Irib-News)

### **KAZAKH PARLIAMENT VOTES TO SEND PEACEKEEPERS TO IRAQ**

**30 May**

Kazakhstan's parliament on 30 May voted in favor of sending a group of military engineers to participate in the U.S.-led international stabilization force in Iraq. The parliamentary action was in response to a written request from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, who reportedly emphasized the political and international importance of the participation of Kazakh peacekeepers in international reconstruction activities in Iraq. Defense Minister Colonel General Mukhtar Altyntaev reportedly told parliament that the Kazakh contingent will consist of 25 persons, including eight officers, three interpreters, and a group of contract servicemen. The contingent, which Altyntaev said has been training for such missions for a long time, is scheduled to remain in Iraq for six months. The primary tasks of the Kazakh peacekeepers will be to search for water and remove land mines, according to Altyntaev. He estimated that the peacekeeping force could cost Kazakhstan as much as \$98,000. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

### **TAJIK TRAINS REROUTED TO AVOID MOST TURKMEN BORDER CROSSINGS**

**30 May**

Tajik Railways passenger-service department head Safarali Taifurov announced that Uzbekistan has rerouted trains from Tajikistan to Russia to avoid all but one of the Turkmen-Uzbek border crossings that were used by the former route, Asia Plus-Blitz reported on 29 May. The new branch line, from Bukhara through Karakalpakstan, means that Tajik passengers will have to pass through passport and customs control twice instead of the previous seven times. The new route, although longer, will not increase travel time, according to Taifurov, and will permit a reduction in the price of tickets. Last month the head of Tajik Railways complained of attacks on Tajik trains and passengers on the route that repeatedly crossed into Turkmen territory. (RFE/RL)

## **U.S. TO PROVIDE FURTHER ASSISTANCE TO TAJIKISTAN IN FIGHTING DRUG-TRAFFICKING**

**30 May**

Under an agreement signed in Dushanbe on 29 May by Tajik Deputy Prime Minister Saidamir Zuhurov and U.S. Charge d'Affaires Kenneth Gross, Washington will provide Tajikistan with a further \$2.4 million to finance efforts against drug-trafficking. Part of the money will finance technical assistance and training for the Tajik law enforcement agencies. The United States will also appoint a special counselor to its Dushanbe embassy who will liaise with the Tajik power ministries and intelligence service on drug-related issues. The agreement supplements one signed earlier this year (Asia Plus-Blitz).

## **TURKMEN FOREIGN MINISTRY ACCUSES RUSSIAN MEDIA OF DEFAMATION**

**30 May**

The Turkmen Foreign Ministry on 30 May issued a statement accusing the Russian media, particularly NTV, of misleading public opinion and defaming Turkmenistan. The statement said the previous day's NTV evening news broadcast attempted to damage Turkmen-Russian relations, and complained that the Russian Foreign Ministry and other Russian agencies have failed to take measures to stop such activities. Among the specific complaints in the Turkmen Foreign Ministry statement were the network's allowing the sister of imprisoned former Turkmen Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov – whom the statement described as a "terrorist" -- to make "slandorous statements." NTV also allegedly distorted facts about a recent visit of OSCE Special Representative for Central Asia Martti Ahtisaari to Ashgabat and broadcast an "insulting" interview with State Duma International Affairs Committee Chairman Dmitrii Rogozin about the situation of ethnic Russians in Turkmenistan. The statement asserted that the alleged defamation campaign is motivated by someone irritated by the "great authority Turkmenistan enjoys in the world community." The statement went on to threaten that Turkmenistan reserves the right to "take the necessary actions in line with the norms of international law" if the Russian authorities fail to take measures against the broadcasters of objectionable material. (turkmenistan.ru)

## **G8 ISSUES WEAPONS WARNING**

**2 June**

Leaders of the world's richest nations have called for tighter control of arms, including nuclear weapons and missiles which could be used by terrorists. A statement issued at the end of a Group of Eight (G8) meeting in France made specific reference to Iran and North Korea, urging them to comply with international nuclear safeguards. The summit was the first opportunity for many of the leaders to meet since sharp divisions developed over the war in Iraq. French President Jacques Chirac held talks with his US counterpart George W Bush, which they both said had been held in a positive and constructive atmosphere. Huge protests which erupted into violence on the first day of the G8 meeting on Sunday were not repeated on Monday. The closing statement from the summit in the town of Evian called global terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction "the pre-eminent threat to

international security". It said the world community had to use weapons inspections, export controls "and, if necessary, other measures" to tackle the threat of these weapons. "We strongly urge North Korea to visibly, verifiably and irreversibly dismantle any nuclear weapons programmes," said the statement. It added that Iran's nuclear programme could also lead to weapons production. A senior British official reported that Russian President Vladimir Putin had said that Moscow would "stop all nuclear exports" to Iran until it signed an additional protocol with the United Nations nuclear agency. Earlier in the day, Iran invited the US to take part in the construction of its nuclear power plants in an effort to allay Washington's suspicions that Tehran is building nuclear weapons. The idea was rejected last week by the US when it was suggested by Russia. The G8 nations - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the UK and the US - also issued an action plan designed to keep portable surface-to-air missiles out of the hands of terrorists. (BBC)

## **RUSSIA REPORTEDLY TO HALT NUCLEAR EXPORTS TO IRAN**

**2 June**

President Vladimir Putin told his fellow G-8 leaders at their summit in Evian, France, on 2 June that Russia will halt "all nuclear exports" to Iran until that country signs on to a stricter protocol on nuclear inspections. Iran earlier the same day said it will not accede to the Additional Protocol of the Non-Proliferation Treaty under which signatories would make their nuclear facilities available for unannounced inspections. Putin's statement came after the G-8 leaders signed a statement that called weapons of mass destruction the "preeminent threat" to international security. Meanwhile, Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko said in Moscow the same day that Russia believes the protocol "strengthens the nonproliferation mode, and therefore we shall try energetically to persuade all countries to join the protocol. Iran is no exception in this respect." (RIA-Novosti)

## **TAJIK HEALTH MINISTRY EMPLOYEE CAUGHT WITH 5.5 KILOS OF HEROIN**

**2 June**

A forensic expert at the Tajik Ministry of Health was detained by customs officials at Dushanbe airport when she tried to smuggle 5.5 kilograms of heroin. The news agency quoted customs officer Colonel Dusti Sherkhonov as saying that the woman had stuffed the heroin into 52 lemons; her lack of luggage and the large quantity of lemons and vegetables caught the attention of the airport customs officials. Sherkhonov, who heads the customs control department for air transport, added that the number of attempts to smuggle drugs by air is increasing, with eight drug couriers carrying more than 10 kilos of heroin, including the latest haul, having been detained at Dushanbe airport since the beginning of 2003. Four of the couriers were attempting to transport drugs in their stomachs. Sherkhonov noted that 2.5 kilos of drugs were seized at the airport in 2002. (Asia-Plus Blitz)

## **UZBEK JOURNALIST CHARGED WITH HOMOSEXUALITY**

**2 June**

Uzbek journalist Ruslan Sharipov has been charged with

homosexuality, Human Rights Watch reported on 29 May. This is the first known case of an arrest for homosexuality in independent Uzbekistan. Sexual relations between men are still a crime under the Criminal Code and are punishable by up to three years in prison. Sharipov was arrested on 26 May on Tashkent's main square and has been held since then in the city's main pretrial detention center. Sharipov freely admits his sexual orientation, although he denies having had relations with two youths who are the main witnesses against him. Members of international and local human rights organizations reportedly have been able to visit the detained journalist, and he is being allowed to choose his own defense lawyer. (centralasia.ru)

### **US SOLDIERS 'HELD BY IRAN'**

**3 June**

Four United States soldiers and five civilians on boats were detained and interrogated by Iranians for several hours on Sunday, according to US Central Command. They were sailing up the Shatt al-Arab waterway when they were taken by force, a spokesman for Central Command said on Monday. The soldiers and three of the civilians, including an oil contractor, were escorted back to their boats and released on Monday, the spokesman added. The nationalities of the civilians are unclear. They were en route to the Mini al-Bakr platform to conduct a survey when the Iranians took the crew and blindfolded them, the spokesman said. They were then taken to a building where they were interrogated on Sunday night. On Monday the Iranians took the group back to their boats and released all of them except the two drivers, Central Command said. A Chinook helicopter located the group near the waterway, and US Navy soldiers drove the boats to Kuwait. Initial medical examinations indicate there were no injuries or signs of physical abuse. The group may have moved into Iranian territorial waters by mistake, the spokesman said. The Mini al-Bakr platform is close to Iran's international water. A border dispute between Iraq and Iran over the Shatt al-Arab was one of reasons that sparked the eight-year war between the two countries in 1980. (BBC)

### **ARMENIAN PRESIDENT SATISFIED WITH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OUTCOME**

**3 June**

A spokesman for President Robert Kocharian told RFE/RL on 2 June that Kocharian is content with the results of the 25 May parliamentary election in which parties loyal to the president gained 70 of the 131 seats. He said talks are under way with various political forces, without specifying which ones, and

affirmed that "it is possible to form a majority in the National Assembly that will work effectively and for a long time." Also on 2 June, the pro-presidential Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaksutiun (HHD), whose spokesmen claim it polled significantly more than the 11.4 percent of the vote officially computed, said it is prepared to continue its participation in the government despite the falsification of the poll outcome by Prime Minister Andranik Markarian's Republican Party of Armenia, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. (RFE/RL)

### **POLICE FORCIBLY PREVENT AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PROTEST**

**3 June**

Armed police on 3 June forcibly prevented Azerbaijani oppositionists from congregating outside the parliament building in Baku to protest the provisions of the new election law. Police reportedly beat some demonstrators and arrested several dozen of them. On 2 June, Baku deputy police chief Yashar Aliev warned representatives of opposition parties aligned in the Opposition Coordinating Council (MKM) that organized the demonstration that the municipal authorities had rejected their application for permission to hold the protest outside the parliament building and had proposed an alternative venue. The opposition leaders rejected that proposed alternative. (Turan)

### **KYRGYZ PRIME MINISTER DENIES HE SUGGESTED MINISTERS SUE PARLIAMENTARIANS**

**3 June**

Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev's press office denied on 31 May that Tanaev had made official statements about suing members of parliament over their criticism of his government and the country's law enforcement agencies, akipress.org reported on 2 June. The nongovernmental organization Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society had distributed a statement on 29 May asserting that Tanaev had told two government ministers that they should look into the possibility of suing individual parliamentarians if they had insulted the "honor and dignity" of the government in public statements. Tanaev's press office denied that the prime minister's remark was an official call for individual lawmakers to be sued for criticisms aired during a discussion of the state of law enforcement in the country. Presumably the NGO's statement was partially motivated by Tanaev's practice of suing publications and journalists that he claims have libeled him and obtaining huge court awards that are effectively restricting the activity of the independent media in Kyrgyzstan. (RFE/RL)

