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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/June 2, 2004

ANALYTIC ARTICLES:**YET ANOTHER ROSE REVOLUTION? GEORGIA'S "TWO BROTHERS" CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH OSSETIA.....3***Theresa Freese*

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EUROPE AND THE CAUCASUS: IN SEARCH FOR A PURPOSE.....9*Svante Cornell*

Ahead of the Dutch presidency of the European Union, expectations have risen that the EU will in mid-June incorporate the South Caucasus into the European Neighborhood Policy. While this move, supported by most member states, the European Commission, and the EU Special Representative to the Region, is likely to generate hope of a larger EU role in the region, the EU's old problems regarding the South Caucasus have not changed: there is still no national or institutional driving force in the EU for a true strategy towards the region. While the EU is showing signs of reversing its isolation from the region, it would likely be a mistake to assume that the EU will seriously engage with the South Caucasus.

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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.

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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 and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell, Editor

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YET ANOTHER ROSE REVOLUTION? GEORGIA'S "TWO BROTHERS" CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH OSSETIA

Theresa Freese

Allegedly as a result of a renegade Russian General's provocation, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs dispatched a formidable number of troops to four village contraband checkpoints bordering the separatist territories of South Ossetia on 31 May. Simultaneously, Georgian officials established a "special governmental group" headquartered in Tkviavi village, ten kilometers south of Tskhinvali. President Saakashvili announced a series of socio-economic incentives for both the Ossetian and Georgian populations inhabiting the conflict zone in an attempt to establish territorial integrity. Can Georgia's new leaders be successful in inciting yet another peaceful revolution?

BACKGROUND: The Georgian government's strategy in South Ossetia is threefold. First, anti-contraband activities are meant to financially weaken the authorities and pro-Russian criminal figures governing South Ossetia and to provide security forces to the region. Second, *Kmara* and civil society activists are operating in Tskhinvali to attract revolutionary support from within the Ossetian community. Third, President Saakashvili is offering socio-economic benefits to the Georgian and Ossetian populations residing in South Ossetia, thus demonstrating his commitment to uniting both communities under the Georgian flag.

Officials began setting the stage for an Ossetian revolution under the guise of an anti-corruption campaign targeting the transit of contraband from Russia, through Roki Tunnel, into Tskhinvali. Most entered the infamous Ergneti black market, where it was being sold tax-free and directed along the plethora of roads winding out of Tskhinvali into Georgian-controlled territory. Smuggling undermines the Georgian economy and forms the main source of income for the separatist Ossetian government and the criminal, pro-Russia forces supporting them.

National Movement party activists began to assist the Shida Kartli authorities by physically blocking contraband roads. The campaign resulted in a failed assassination attempt against the Shida Kartli governor, Mikheil Kareli, by Ossetian police on 24 May. Two days later, the Governor returned to South Ossetia to lead Independence Day celebrations in Tamarasheni, a Georgian-controlled village just down the road from Tskhinvali. Shida Kartli officials now boast that Ergneti is now being dismantled as a result of their activities.

According to civil society activists, a large segment of the Ossetian population is already fed up with their corrupt government and would welcome a revolution if given the right support. Tea Tutberidze, a Tbilisi-based *Kmara* leader, explained that one Ossetian group, which goes by the Ossetian word for *Kmara*—*Fagu*—has been acting undercover, in Tskhinvali, for the last month and is responsible for developing ties with other frustrated branches of the Ossetian population. Tutberidze stressed that all activists would be Ossetian, not Georgian, and that all groups should develop inside Tskhinvali lest anti-government activities would be rejected as a Georgian import.

In a nationally televised address, President Saakashvili outlined a series of socio-economic incentives, including: establishing an

Ossetian-language television station in Shida Kartli; providing pensions to Ossetian pensioners; reestablishing the "Tskhinvali Railway", now defunct for 12 years; providing free ambulatory care and agricultural chemicals for Georgians and Ossetians in the region; further, the Georgians would fill their quota of 500 Peacekeepers (up from 90) to the Russian-Georgian-Ossetian Joint Peacekeeping Forces (Ossetians currently have 500).

Saakashvili also noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin had no prior knowledge of threats by Russian Peacekeeping leader General Sviataslav Nabdzorov's threats to dissolve the village contraband checkpoints bordering the Ossetian-controlled territories—prompted the Interior Ministry to dispatch troops to the region and to set up special headquarters in Tkviavi. If true, Russia might, yet again, allow another Georgian revolution to occur.

IMPLICATIONS Numerous officials insist it is necessary for Georgia to establish territorial integrity in South Ossetia not only because it will unite the unofficially divided region of Shida Kartli—the "heart of Georgia", but because it will allow Georgia to establish permanent customs control and border mechanisms, thus enabling economic and social development. Until then, Georgia's heartland is divided in half, and combating the contraband entering Georgia from Tskhinvali will be impossible. This situation not only destabilizes Georgia, but perpetuates an endemic system of corruption.

Confident that Russia would not interfere in a Tskhinvali revolution, experts such as Temuri Yakobashvili stress that military interference would be a political disaster for Russian authorities.

If successful, Georgia would have to consider how to administer South Ossetia, officially a part of Shida Kartli, but de facto independent. Would Tskhinvali region and the neighboring Java district form a separate administrative unit with a special status, or will they be officially incorporated into Shida Kartli as districts? For the last few months, Georgian authorities have been setting up local administrative offices in the Georgian-controlled territories of Liakhvi and Proni Gorges to meet immediate social welfare, economic, and security needs. Civil society activists point to the lack of leadership that Saakashvili's government can turn to if the time comes to form a new government, though many expect that free and fair local elections might solve this problem.

If contraband continues to wither away, authorities will have to address the potential for a South Ossetian economic decline. While authorities emphasize that money earned from contraband goes straight into the pockets of "high officials" and criminals, they realize that many Ossetians' livelihood depends on it.

Georgians living in the conflict zone claim to harbor no ill-will towards the Ossetians. However, those Ossetians who harbor dark memories of atrocities committed against them during the 1990 to 1992 Georgian-Ossetian conflict will be more difficult to entice. One official, who himself claimed to have been tortured by Ossetian forces while defending his village, stressed that Georgians and Ossetians in the conflict zone commonly refer to each other as "two brothers". He added, however, that there are Ossetians who will never accept Georgian rule. He thought some might choose to emigrate to North Ossetia or to other parts of Russia, which could pose problems for the Russian North Caucasus.

Probably the most significant challenge ahead would be the rehabilitation of Ossetian youth who have been fed anti-Georgian, pro-Russian propaganda from birth. One Tskhinvali-based NGO leader described how she recently overheard one young child describing how he would take his father's gun and kill any Georgians he found on his territory. A *Kmara* activist noted

that these youth are the most likely to become aggressive toward Georgians. Ossetian children grew up with a memorial in the center of Tskhinvali that states, "Buried here are those killed by Georgians". Moreover, many Ossetian children do not speak Georgian and grew up speaking Russian or Ossetian.

CONCLUSIONS: The socio-economic incentives President Saakashvili is offering the South Ossetian communities directly addresses many concerns a revolution would raise. If Georgian authorities are successful in cutting off the Ossetians from their primary source of income, smuggling, Tskhinvali authorities will face some tough decisions. Civil society activists stress that as long as President Saakashvili can deliver on economic benefits and security guarantees, Ossetians might be willing to unite peacefully with Georgia. However, considering an Ossetian fear that Georgians wish to "conquer Tskhinvali", Saakashvili has no assurance that Tskhinvali residents will not embrace a violent response as Georgians appear to hover over Tskhinvali. Moreover, it remains unclear how Russia will respond to future events.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Theresa Freese is a graduate of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at the Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C. and is currently conducting research on Georgia's regional reforms.

KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT FIGHTS CORRUPTION IN LAW ENFORCEMENT SYSTEM

The Kyrgyz Government conducts a massive anti-corruption campaign within state system. In the past month, nearly 285 criminal cases against state officials for power misuse and bribing were filed by the General Procurator. Law enforcement structures became highly criminalized and corrupted; and President Askar Akaev ordered that to stop. However, the pressure of law enforcement bodies on opposition groups is admitted by government.

On April 13, 2004, President Askar Akaev strongly criticized law enforcement bodies' activity and demanded to enforce measures in the struggle against corruption.

Akaev criticized law enforcement agencies for failing to carry out specific tasks in eradicating corruption, economic crimes and robberies. According to the president, "Criminal elements are unpunished, permeate state agencies, seek power and terrorize the state" and "international experts and many citizens consider law enforcement agencies, primarily the police, as the most corrupt structures in Kyrgyzstan. They also say the criminal world is merging with certain representatives of law enforcement, fiscal and special services as well as state agencies".

The breaking point became the murder of the Head of the Directorate on Malfeasance of the Interior Ministry Colonel Chynybek Aliev, who investigated some contract murders and was about to disclose

who ordered them. He was shot to death in a Bishkek street in the evening of May 5, when the Day of Constitution was held in Kyrgyzstan.

On May 14, parliamentary deputies admitted that the activity of the Ministry of Interior was unsatisfactory. The General Procurator Myktybek Abdylbaev stated that the Office of General Procurator enforced its activity and already filed criminal cases against high profile state officials. The ex-governor of Issyk kul oblast Emilbek Anapiyaev was charged with embezzlement. In response, the ex-governor returned US\$53,000 to the state budget. Later, President Askar Akaev dismissed him from his position as presidential envoy.

A cleaning out of the penitentiary system was also conducted. According to *Vecherniy Bishkek* newspaper, several heads of prisons stole funds for prisoners' meals, and criminal cases have been opened against them. Earlier, prison supervisors were complaining of a lack of funds budgeted by the state for prisoners' meals, claiming it as a reason for the spread of tuberculosis.

The Office of the General Procurator and national security services intended to clean up other authorities after the Ministry of Interior. Economic criminal cases have already been filed against some employees of the taxation inspection and other authorities.

On the whole, these have been positive changes in Kyrgyzstan. Earlier, corruption in the Kyrgyz state system was recognized by international organizations as a major barrier to the country's development. However, along with positive changes, the forceful impact on the power of the opposition has been observed.

Erkin Mambetaliev, bodyguard of opposition leader Almazbek Atambaev, was arrested as a possible contract murderer in the case of the assassination of Chynybek Aliev. On May 26, Ombudsman Tursunbay Bakir Uulu along with Atambaev had given press conference, where they stated that Erkin Mambetaliev is now hospitalized after having been tortured to exert a confession. Atambaev earlier declared he will run in the presidential elections of 2005.

Recently, the children of journalists Rina Prijivoyt (MSN newspaper), Zamira Sydykova (Respublika newspaper) were severely beaten by unknown assailants. They claim it is related with their professional activity and a series of articles related to corruption in the Ministry of Interior. They condemned "Bishkek city Interior Ministry staff engaged in political contracts". Human Rights Watch and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights urged President Askar Akaev to stop undue pressure on independent journalists and provide safety for their work.

Anton Sviridov

A NEW SILK ROAD? TAJIKISTAN-CHINA BORDER CROSSING OPENS

Sultonbek Aksakalov

On May 25, China and Tajikistan officially celebrated the opening of a road link at their remotest border, in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region in the west of China and the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast in the east of Tajikistan. This border post will create a route for China through Tajikistan to the heart of Central Asia, Russia the Caspian Sea, and onward. Landlocked Tajikistan will in turn have an opportunity to get an exit into Pakistan, India and further toward the Pacific. Isolated parts of Badakhshan will now have new opportunities to break out of isolation. While the opening of a border is not a cure-all solution, it will help rebuild old trade links.

BACKGROUND: China and Tajikistan established diplomatic relations a year after Tajikistan's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, the two countries have strengthened bilateral cooperation in economy, security, anti-narcotic efforts and environmental protection, rendering support to each other in international affairs. Both Chinese and Tajik government have often claimed that the border between China and Tajikistan will become a site of peace and friendship between the two geographical neighbors, political allies and economic partners. According to official statistics from China, the trade volume between Tajikistan and China in 2002 increased to US\$12.39 million, up 15.2% compared to the previous year.

A connection to China has been the hope and expectation for a prosperous development for Tajikistan, notably for the people of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, for close to a decade. Unlike the rest of Tajikistan, Badakhshan remains in geographical isolation from the capital, Dushanbe, almost throughout the year due to the snowfalls, landslides and river flows. Although this autonomous region benefited from advanced social services, education and health system in the Soviet period, it also to a large extent (over 85%) remained dependent on subsidized supplies from outside the region. These subsidies then disappeared overnight when the Soviet state collapsed.

In the early years of Tajikistan's independence and with the outbreak of civil war, the region for a year remained in economic isolation, with its population significantly increased from 200,000 to more than 250,000 by displaced persons from the civil war. Since then, various international organizations such as the UN, the Red Cross and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) have provided humanitarian relief to a population threatened by hunger and unemployment, and vulnerable to the breakdown in supplies from its precarious link to Dushanbe.

The once-famous 'Highway of Life', the Pamir Highway, was the main route through which humanitarian aid flowed from the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan into Badakhshan. Tajikistan's government also made an effort to open a new road between Badakhshan and central Tajikistan. However, humanitarian aid initially did not aim to replace the heavy subsidies provided by the Soviets, and gradually the Pamir Highway have lost its importance of being a central road. Having

realized the region's dependence, organizations such as the AKDN initiated new projects to promote agricultural productivity by encouraging private farming, providing credit, seeds and technical assistance, and the construction of irrigation channels in districts with available arable land. Yet despite all these internal developments, the region's transition from a state-organized society into a market-oriented one has been developing slowly. Badakhshan's future development depends to a great extent on the connection to broader Central Asian food, fabrics, labor market and industry.

IMPLICATIONS: This dependence is more acute in the case of the Murgab district of Badakhshan, lying at an altitude of more than 3,500 meters in the border area between China and Tajikistan. The population of this district is mainly Kyrgyz, with a small percentage of Tajiks concentrated in the centre of the district, the town of Murgab. Unlike the other districts in Badakhshan, Murgab is not suitable for agricultural development and almost nothing is grown there. Animal husbandry is the main way of surviving for its population. Although international NGOs, especially the AKDN, have implemented projects in the district to improve livestock quality, yields of meat and dairy produce, the quality of life in Murgab has sharply fallen. Due to its location in the middle of the Pamir Highway from Osh (Kyrgyzstan) to Khorog (Tajikistan), the town of Murgab served as a trade point. It was also one of the biggest garrison towns for the Russian 201st Motorized Infantry Division, in which a great percentage of the district's population was employed. But a year ago, the Russian troops left the district, leaving the task of guarding the 500 km border with China to Tajik troops. Traffic and trade on the new road will be the only alternative for Murgab's development, if it succeeds in becoming a trade centre on the road to China.

The opening of a border crossing is unlikely to bring immediate benefits, of course. Initially, a host of problems such as rigid custom laws and procedures, taxation systems, widespread corruption, and the absence of a proper banking system will form obstacles to trade and development. The question of the safety of investors will affect success of trade along this new part of the Silk Road. Other troubling factors may include organized crime. Human trafficking from Tajikistan to neighboring countries and the Middle East and South Asia, as well as drug trafficking from Afghanistan through Tajikistan into other Central Asian republics, Russia,

and China could prove troubling factors for travel through this road. However, exchange of information, and experience at the border, is likely to lead the two countries to launch joint programs tackling human traffic as well as eradicating drug production and trade.

China and Tajikistan have made it a priority to fight any form of religious extremism and separatism within the frame of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Regular traffic along this road will reinforce their joint struggle against the activities of radical religious group such as Hizb-ut Tahrir from Central Asia into China by improving socio-economic conditions across the region. By and large, problems such as widespread unemployment, a culture of dependency, corruption, organized crime, opium trade and production in the Central Asian mountain societies are the result of the colonial border delimitation and years of stagnation. Border openings like Kulma-Karosy (China) should be seen not as a part of the problem, given that the drug trade makes its way easily even without border crossings. Instead, this type of

border openings are a way out of the problems of blocked societies.

CONCLUSIONS: The opening of the border crossing between China and Tajikistan can be seen as a sign of successful bilateral relations between two countries, strengthening their economical and political cooperation allowing for the rapidly growing Chinese economy to attract resources from Tajikistan, and Chinese goods to flow into Central Asian markets. The new road will provide an all year link for mountain communities to the broader lowland developed regions in Central Asian countries and China. More broadly, the event symbolizes the reconstruction of trade links that were blocked by the Soviet experience, and whose absence greatly contributed to the problems of the mountainous regions of Central Asia.

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THE TRIAL OF OPPOSITION LEADERS RUNS INTO A DEADLOCK

The trial of seven opposition leaders, charged with masterminding the post-election violence and disorder last October has run into the deadlock. They have officially rescinded their lawyers and have not been attending the pre-trial for several weeks already, thus delaying the court procedures and putting the trial at deadlock.

The arrested men include the chairmen of opposition parties Umid (Hope), Khalg (People), Igbal Agazadeh and Panah Huseyn respectively; the general secretary of the Democratic party Sardar Jalal-oglu; Musavat Party deputy chairmen Ibrahim Ibrahimli, Arif Haci and Rauf Arifoglu, and the chairman of the Karabakh War Veterans Etimad Asadov. They have been facing state charges in the court for heavy crimes for attempting to forcefully change the results of the presidential elections in favor of their candidate – chairman of Musavat party Isa Gambar.

Following the presidential elections on October 15, 2003, several thousands of opposition activists stormed Baku's central Freedom square and clashed with police and army. The authorities subsequently arrested several hundreds of protestors, but released most of them following the trials. These seven men, however, have received the most attention, both from the local and international media.

The arrested persons accuse the judge Mansur Ibayev of being biased and dependent on the authorities. They reject to have the trial in a

small courtroom, where the majority of their supporters can not fit. Similarly, they protest the fact that the TV cameras are not allowed inside the courtroom and that relatives of the arrested persons are not permitted to meet them in prison. Lately, other points of tensions were the lost TV tapes, which allegedly showed police brutality towards the oppositionists and the fact that the son of the judge works for the prosecutor's office.

Protesting these issues, the opposition leaders first refused to attend the pre-trial session of the court and then, on May 28, rescinded their lawyers, by sending the notification letters to the judge. "Lawyers are needed for the arrested persons in a law-respecting state. In this case, it is useless," says Samad Panahov, one of the lawyers.

The judge, nevertheless, refused to approve the letters, based on the fact that the defendants did not point out the reason for rescinding their lawyers. The Judge also sent a letter to the Bayil prison, where the arrested persons are currently held, to clarify if the refusal letters were written under pressure or not.

Meanwhile, the authorities have harshly criticized the action of the opposition leaders. Ramiz Mehtiyev, chief of the President's Office, has said, "They are trying to artificially prolong the trial till October, when the municipal elections in the country will be held and thus escalate the internal situation in the country once again."

Local analysts believe that one reason for the boycott of the arrested leaders can be the approaching deadline in fall set by the Council of Europe for Azerbaijan to solve the issue of political prisoners in the country. President Ilham Aliyev, earlier in May, issued a pardoning decree and released more than 600 prisoners, some of which were so-called "political prisoners." Before that President Aliyev released another Musavat party deputy chairman, Sulhaddin Akpar. It appears that the Azerbaijani leadership is committed to close this issue once and for all and the delay in the current trial might hurt the international image of Azerbaijan. While in Strasbourg last month, Ilham Aliyev shared his vision for the development of Azerbaijan in the future with the deputies of the Council of Europe and promoting democracy and freedom of speech was one of his main commitments. Human rights activists in Azerbaijan, meanwhile, have repeatedly asked the Azerbaijani leadership to issue a pardon for these seven activists.

The criminal code of Azerbaijan permits the arrested persons to attend the trial without a defense. In this case, the lawyer's functions will be carried out by the defendants themselves. It is not clear yet if the judge will dare to issue a verdict without arrested persons attending the trial, but the court process is certainly at deadlock, perhaps unplanned by the government at the beginning of the trial.

Fariz Ismailzade

OVERFISHING OF STURGEON COULD HARM AZERBAIJAN'S CAVIAR EXPORT

Gulnara Ismailova

From Summer 2004, the export of caviar from Caspian countries including Azerbaijan could be banned. The Geneva-based Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), in March threatened a ban during a three-day meeting of participants to the Convention. As little progress has been done, the Caspian states are facing a possible ban on caviar export. Whether this measure would produce any results is nevertheless doubtful.

BACKGROUND: The environmental situation developing in the Caspian basin has been receiving increasing attention, in parallel to the discovery and extraction of large amounts of oil from the Caspian. If one of the reasons for the Caspian sea's fame is oil, another is the fishing of valuable breeds of sturgeon, especially the Beluga. The Caspian Sea is the preserve of 90% of the world's sturgeon population. While sturgeon is eaten around the Caspian, the main market product is the black caviar, which is mainly exported, bringing millions of dollars a year to Caspian states. During 2003, the market price of black caviar at world markets doubled. If in spring 2003 the price on the European market was up to \$800 per kg, in autumn it had reached \$1500, and is still increasing.

Black caviar could be termed one of the national symbols of Azerbaijan. From old time, it has the deserved glory as the best, most nutritious delicacy among fish products. The larger and the lighter its grains are, the better and more expensive the caviar.

Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Azerbaijan exported 55 tons of black caviar per year. During Soviet times, the amount was significantly reduced. In 1962, after an agreement between the USSR and Iran, the fishing of sturgeon was completely prohibited. Thus in 1975-1980 Azerbaijan was not able to export caviar. In 1980, only 5,2 tons of caviar were produced. After independence, significant progress took place in the fishing industry. In 1992-93, a significant increase in caviar production took place, reaching 52 tons per year. At this time, special equipment was purchased from Germany to reach world standards of preserving caviar. Three factories were installed in Lenkoran, Neftchala, and in Hovsani settlement (near Baku) and were supplied from Ukraine. From 1993-96, production remained basically stagnant; only in recent years did it spread considerably. Today the situation is on the verge of a disaster: contamination of the environment and poaching is now threatening to lead to the extinction of sturgeon and all activities related to it. The problem is compounded by illegal fishing conducted both by private and state-owned fleets.

The problems of the Caspian Sea have been under the observation of CITES for some time, and Azerbaijan joined this international body in 1999. In Fall 2001, a CITES monitoring mission was sent to the Caspian littoral states,

and its results were not consoling. Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan took the recommendations of environmental experts into account, and starting from 2002 a strict regime on sturgeon fishing and on the production and export of black caviar came into place. This regime did not affect Iran, which has a state monopoly on sturgeon fishing. In any case, it helped little, as poaching and illegal sturgeon trade is considered to be 10-12 times larger than legal activity. As a result, the sturgeon population is on the brink of disappearance.

IMPLICATIONS: Over 2000 attempts of poaching in the Caspian Sea have been prevented this year, and over 100 tons of sturgeon fish and 300 kg of black caviar have been confiscated. These steps have proven to be too little too late. If the four post-Soviet Caspian states are found to be neglecting the requirements of the 2001 Paris Convention on the protection of sturgeon, these four Caspian countries may be prohibited to export caviar. At a meeting in Spring 2004, the four states were given three months to submit convincing proof that they are undertaking steps to protect the sturgeon.

Environmental specialists protested against this, contending that these countries have already demonstrated their inability or unwillingness to stop poachers and to undertake any meaningful measures to preserve the sturgeon. According to their calculations, from 1970 the sturgeon population in the Caspian Sea has been reduced almost by 90%. Moreover, recent research has shown that only within 2001-2002 it has shrunk by 40%. The chairman of Azerbaijan's society of animal protection, Azer Karayev, also supports the prohibition of sturgeon trade, arguing it is necessary to introduce a several year long complete moratorium on caviar export and sturgeon trade.

However, if sturgeon trade is prohibited, poaching will flourish, and Caspian states have few resources to deal effectively with poaching. Azerbaijani officials claim they have enacted all relevant legislation in accordance with CITES requirements in 1998, whereas Russia,

Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have yet to do so. They argue that CITES' regional approach fails to take into account the different performance of littoral states.

The practice of recent years has shown, however, that the use of police measures and even

military operations against poachers have not provided the desired effect. On April 22, Kazakhstani officials detained 3 Azerbaijani vessels with 6 tons of sturgeon on board, 30 km off the Kazakh coast.

CONCLUSIONS: It is clear that the efforts by littoral Caspian states so far in preventing the overfishing of sturgeon have failed. Azerbaijan has set up a sturgeon-cultivation factory at Neftchala, and taken other steps in law enforcement against poachers. These measures seem unlikely to save the sturgeon population. In part, the problem stems from a lack of appropriate executive attention to the issue. Some have suggested a specific power structure attached to

the Cabinet of Ministers to be engaged in environmental and specifically fish protection in the Caspian. If poaching is unlikely to be stopped, the small steps taken toward the cultivation of sturgeon may be the most promising way to halt the decline in sturgeon population.

In the meantime, the Caspian states are threatened by a ban on the export of caviar. Whether such a ban would create enough political pressure to achieve results, or whether it will lead to poachers taking total control of the caviar business, remains to be seen.

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KAZAKHS FEAR CHINESE "CREEPING EXPANSION"

The signing of an agreement on the construction of the Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline by officials of the Kazakh "Kazmunaygaz" company and the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) on May 17 marked a new phase in Sino-Kazakh economic relations. The landmark event signifies the starting point in implementing the gigantic project first conceived in 1997. But not everyone in Kazakhstan is happy about the increasing Chinese economic presence in the country.

As was made public by "Kazmunaygaz" officials, the construction of the 988 kilometer long pipeline which is to link Atasu railway station in Central Kazakhstan with Alashankou terminal on the Chinese border will start this year. It is estimated that the construction of the pipeline with a projected capacity of 20 million tons of oil annually will cost a total of \$688.4 million.

The economic importance of the new pipeline route which enables the export of Kazakh oil to insatiable Chinese markets is hard to overestimate. Kazakhstan would be happy to induce Russia to export its oil to China via Kazakhstan. But Russian bureaucrats from the "Transneft" state monopoly seem to be deterred by an unsettled tariff policy. Most likely, at the initial stage the new pipeline will be used only by CNPC and the Canadian PetroKazakhstan Inc., operating on the Kumkol fields.

The signing of the pipeline agreement was timed to coincide with the official visit of the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev with Chairman Hu Tsintao. Both leaders lavished many words on the significance of nine agreements reached on various areas of economic relations. Addressing the Kazakh-Sino business Forum in Urumchi, heavily populated by ethnic Uyghurs and Kazakhs, President Nazarbayev pledged that Kazakhstan would support the rapidly developing western parts of China, and particularly the Xinjiang-Uigur autonomous region, a trouble spot near the

Kazakh border, where ethnic rebellions against Chinese rulers took place in recent past. The sides are set to push up the trade volume from \$3 billion to \$5 billion in coming years.

Despite seemingly bright prospects, relations between China and Kazakhstan remain strained in many areas. Growing numbers of Kazakhs are alarmed at the expanding business activities of 40 or so Chinese companies nestled in Kazakhstan, the largest of them being the "CNPC-Aktobemunaygaz" company. The Aktobe region, where the company is located, is in spite of its oil reserves one of the poorest and most burdensome regions in the country for the Government. Chinese business executives, as constantly reported in the press, largely employ Chinese specialists brought in from China, ignoring their commitment to train and hire local workforce.

Even those few who are employed by the Chinese complain that they receive only half of the salary paid to Chinese workers. For residents of Aktobe region, oil fields are the only sources of income to support their precarious existence. To justify the miserable payment, the company owners say that Kazakh workers are not qualified enough to perform a high-paid job. Apart from financial constraints, Kazakhs in Chinese companies are placed under pressure. In a letter to the "Ana tili" ("Mother tongue") paper a group of local workers from "CNPC-Aktobemunaygaz" lamented that their bosses tried to make Kazakhs sing Chinese national anthem.

What is regarded as a total disrespect for local traditions and ethics provokes parliamentary debates. On the insistence of parliament members, the CNPC-Aktobemunaygaz had to send home nearly 40% of Chinese specialists and replace them by trained local workers. Additionally, the company promised to open job training courses for Kazakh specialists and to raise their salary. Although the workers won the

first major battle, alarming signs are still there. According to the National Statistical Board, slightly more than 3,500 Chinese permanently reside in Kazakhstan. Analysts say that this figure is by far inaccurate. Their estimations indicate that in 2003 alone, 20,242 Chinese citizens were registered with the Interior Ministry. It is everyone's guess how many Chinese nationals entered the country illegally and settled for residence.

Kazakhstan is thought to be a paradise for visitors from overpopulated China. They invent the most intricate excuses to obtain Kazakh citizenship, and stay in the country for permanent residence, including marrying Kazakh girls. Market places of East Kazakhstan region and Almaty are teeming with Chinese traders. Many fear that the land privatization process may encourage Chinese influx. The prominent writer and parliament member Sherkhan Murtaza says: "If the land is to be privatized by foreigners we will see a stream of invaders flowing in. And they will come not from America, not from European countries, but from the East, from the land of the dragons. Once they get in, they will never get out. They will stay here at any cost, even if they have to marry a dying old woman".

The popular mistrust towards Chinese migrants is inflamed by inconsistent government policy. In the summer of 1998, Kazakhstan ceded the 500 kilometer long border stretch to China to settle peacefully territorial disputes in Almaty and East Kazakhstan border areas, which was seen as weakness of the leadership. Critics believe that caving in to Chinese demands government sells out national interests, exposing the demographic situation of the country. It seems, it has taken too long for the government to wake up to the political potency of creeping migration from China to Kazakhstan.

Marat Yermukanov

EUROPE AND THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: IN SEARCH FOR A PURPOSE

Svante Cornell

Ahead of the Dutch presidency of the European Union, expectations have risen that the EU will in mid-June incorporate the South Caucasus into the European Neighborhood Policy. While this move, supported by most member states, the European Commission, and the EU Special Representative to the Region, is likely to generate hope of a larger EU role in the region, the EU's old problems regarding the South Caucasus have not changed: there is still no national or institutional driving force in the EU for a true strategy towards the region. While the EU is showing signs of reversing its isolation from the region, it would likely be a mistake to assume that the EU will seriously engage with the South Caucasus.

BACKGROUND: The European Union's relationship with the South Caucasus has been perplexing for several years. European states, individually and collectively, are significant donors to the South Caucasus: a billion Euro worth of aid has been allocated since the early 1990s, with little to show for it. In fact, European policy in the South Caucasus has been characterized variously as a "costly failure" or as a policy of "splendid isolation". Other European multilateral organizations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and increasingly NATO (mainly through its Partnership for Peace Program), have been considerably involved in the region. In spite of its aspirations to a role as a global actor stated in its Security Strategy, the EU has nevertheless chosen not to engage the South Caucasus in a meaningful way. While individual member states and EU institutions have made occasional pushes for a greater EU role (most obviously the European Parliament's request for a EU strategy toward the region) the lack of strategic vision was best illustrated by the decision in March 2003 to leave the South Caucasus outside the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This in spite of the equally significant challenges to European security, as well as European interests, in this region compared to other areas included in ENP such parts of North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean; and in spite of the institutional connection of the states of the South Caucasus to the European family of nations, primarily through membership in the Council of Europe and NATO's Partnership for Peace program – which other states included in ENP do not have. The South Caucasus was left out mainly because no influential member state was arguing the case of including the region.

This is not for a lack of actual, discernable European interests; in fact, the EU faces obvious challenges but also opportunities in the South Caucasus. Among the former, the rise of transnational organized crime ranks high, as do issues of extremism and terrorism, the unresolved ethnic conflicts with their potential danger of conflict and migration flows, regional arms races, and environmental concerns. Opportunities center mainly on the energy resources of the region and the role of the South Caucasus as both a source area and transit corridor for oil and gas supplies to Europe, which remains heavily dependent on Persian gulf oil and

Russian gas supplies. The building of the South Caucasus as a hub of trade between Europe and Asia was acknowledged by the EU in the early 1990s through the TRACECA project. However, TRACECA is cash-starved and inactive in spite of its promise and the interest of regional states.

IMPLICATIONS: In Summer 2003, in a move to rectify the mistake of leaving the South Caucasus outside the ENP, the EU appointed a Special Representative to the South Caucasus, the Finnish Diplomat and former co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group Mr. Heikki Talvitie. The Special Representative's mandate is limited, however, and the distribution of duties among EU agencies and between them and the Special Representative is unclear. In the past, the interest of the individual member state holding the rotating presidency of the EU seems to have been a determining factor. Some states, such as Finland, Sweden and Greece, made the South Caucasus a priority on their agenda; others did not, taking away coherence in the EU's approach to the region. The appointment of a Special Representative was thought to reduce this problem, which would nevertheless require a stronger mandate.

In mid-June 2004, the EU is likely to reverse its exclusion of the South Caucasus from ENP. Instead of being literally a footnote, it is expected that the EU will include Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia into the main instrument of EU relations with its periphery. This is a welcome development, but questions remain as to whether this means a true EU engagement is forthcoming.

In fact, the EU faces a host of problems in trying to formulate a policy toward the region. Firstly, the South Caucasus is likely to continue to be a backburner issue given the large issues looming over the Dutch presidency of the EU in the remaining half of 2004. The debate over the EU's Constitution is likely to remain a major internal issue; while the question of whether to grant Turkey a date for accession talks could well dominate the EU's external relations. Transatlantic and trade relations and the unrest in the Middle East and Iraq are other issues that rank higher than the South Caucasus in priority.

Secondly, while trying to find a role for itself in the South Caucasus, the EU is entering a crowded scene. A host of

multilateral organizations are already at work, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. Individual states, including EU member states, are other actors on the scene. Both member states and other organizations can pose diplomatic challenges to an increased EU role, especially in conflict resolution; the French role in the OSCE Minsk group illustrates both of these problems simultaneously.

EU member states already form a large majority of the members in most international organizations active in the South Caucasus, including the Council of Europe, the OSCE, or NATO. In this context, the specific role that the EU as an organization could play remains to be determined; if not, the EU may only play a coordinating role among its member states within these other organizations with more specific mandates.

Finally, the basic internal problem that the EU faces vis-à-vis this region has not changed: there is no driving force for the formulation and implementation of EU strategy or EU priorities in the South Caucasus. If both North Africa and the Western CIS have obvious sponsors within the EU, this is not the case for the South Caucasus. It is telling that the EU presidencies which have done the greatest impact on the region have been those of smaller EU members.

CONCLUSIONS: The inclusion of the South Caucasus in the European Neighborhood Policy is a positive development. Rather than being hailed as a success, however, it should be seen as an overdue correction of a strategic mistake. It now remains for the EU to outline a strategic vision for its relationship with the states of the South Caucasus and of its own role in that region. This process is likely to be gradual and unhurried. The EU is still in need to be thoroughly convinced that it is in the collective and individual interest of its members to engage with the South Caucasus. For a more coherent EU role to appear, a stronger institutional or national driving force within the union will likely need to emerge. Unless that happens, the great potential that the EU countries could potentially exercise to bolster the security and development of the South Caucasus – and thereby improve its own security – will remain unfulfilled.

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TURKMENISTAN CELEBRATES A TRIPLE HOLIDAY

The number of celebrations and traditional events has been mushrooming in Turkmenistan since its independence was granted in October 27, 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This Tuesday, the 18th of Magtymguly (May) marked the festivity of three big events in Turkmenistan – Solidarity, National Revival and Day of Magtymguly's Poetry. Establishing similar holidays and developing pertinent policies have been a part of an overwhelmingly dominant policy of nationalism in Turkmenistan.

As any other country in Central Asia, Turkmenistan is in its rudimentary level of economic, political and cultural revival from 72 years of Soviet rule. Remaining under a stringent command system, its rich natural resources allows Turkmenistan's Government to provide its population with free gas, electricity, salt, and drinking water. Historically, five Turkmen tribes such as Teke, Yomut, Gokleng, Yazyr and Ali ran a nomadic life of continuing discord and were hostile even among themselves prior to the Soviet invasion. Building inter-tribal unity and cohesion had been an everlasting aspiration of the Turkmens. Today, these five tribes still constitute the main structure and content of the population in Turkmenistan.

In the 18th of the month of Magtymguly 1992, the Constitution of Turkmenistan was adopted that declared Turkmenistan as a secular and democratic state. The adoption day of the constitution was officially declared as the Day of Revival and Solidarity in Turkmenistan. The following day, the 19th of May, was usually marked with celebration of the Day of Magtymguly's Poetry, a well renowned Turkmen poet; however with Turkmenbashi's decree of 2000, the Day of Magtymguly's Poetry was moved to the 18th, and a chain of celebrations or a "triple holiday" came out in Turkmenistan. Today, this date of a duster of

celebrations also coincided with the 12th anniversary of the constitution of Turkmenistan.

Developing a policy of solidarity or unity and making it an official holiday in Turkmenistan bodes well for maintaining stability in the country. Building peace and stability was the main objective behind the decree of 1992 per se that announced these holidays. In addition, a policy of solidarity is aimed at building a harmonious life of what the main newspaper Neytralnyi Turkmenistan (Neutral Turkmenistan) reports is 40 different nationalities residing in Turkmenistan. "No conflict and no major crime in our country are signs of solidarity and development" said Turkmenbashi, speaking about the years of independence. Moreover, a policy of solidarity and revival also constitutes a part of the Presidential National Program "Strategy of economical, political and cultural development of Turkmenistan until 2020." In this context, a National Revival – a nationwide process or movement, the President's official policy is essentially aimed at restoring historical Turkmen values, culture and creating higher living standards in Turkmenistan.

On this day, President Niyazov congratulated the nation of Turkmenistan by wishing eternal harmony, health and prosperity. As it is declared an official state holiday, state employees are released from work to join the celebration of the event nationwide. Lasting from morning till evening, thousands of people gathered at the Garashyzyk (Independence) Park in the capital Ashgabat and put flowers on Magtymguly's monument. Representatives from the Cabinet of Ministries, the Mejlis (legislature of Turkmenistan) Non-Governmental Organizations as well as representatives of foreign embassies and firms in

Turkmenistan were among those who gathered to celebrate the "triple holiday."

Magtymguly was one of the most influential and prominent Turkmen classics and writers of the eighteenth century. What distinguished him from others is that he often wrote about the Turkmen peoples' historical dreams and aspirations for independence and building a strong Turkmen state. In his poems, Magtymguly also called all five hitherto belligerent Turkmen tribes to come together and serve one state avoiding inter-tribal hostilities.

On this occasion, a monument of Magtymguly was erected in his honor in Balkan velayat (region) of Turkmenistan. A special exhibition of national carpets and precious stones along with Magtymguly's poems was held in the National Museum in the capital city of Ashgabat. Besides, as the Neytralnyi Turkmenistan reports, there was a special evening ceremony held in Moscow on the occasion of the Day of Magtymguly's Poetry. Representatives of embassies, the Turkmen Diaspora in Moscow, and many other poets participated in the ceremony. The Executive Committee of the International Association of the Union of Writers and the Moscow Society of Turkmen culture were the initiators of the ceremony.

Thus, this nationwide process of nationalization is viewed and expected to be a guarantee of stability, national revival, human rights, economical prosperity and social welfare in what Turkmenbashi declared as the "Golden Century of the Turkmen." As the President's widespread policy of National Revival gains support in the country, further subsequent policies and reforms are to follow to foster nationalism in Turkmenistan.

Chemen Durdiyeva

NEWS BITES

KAZAKH PRESIDENT WRAPS UP CHINA VISIT

19 May

President Nursultan Nazarbaev ended his official visit to China on 19 May. On the final day of his visit, he attended a business forum in Urumqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), a region that accounts for nearly 70 percent of the \$3 billion annual trade volume between China and Kazakhstan. In a statement he delivered in Urumqi to the Kazakh press, Nazarbaev summed up the results of his trip, stressing the importance of Kazakhstan's agreement with China on the construction of the Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline. Nazarbaev called the pipeline "a new route for future Kazakh oil." "This is the diversification and multivector approach I have been talking about. I think that neither the West nor Russia should harbor any unease about this," he said. (KazInform)

GEORGIAN YOUTH ACTIVISTS SET SIGHTS ON SOUTH OSSETIA

20 May

The Information and Press Department of the government of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia reports that activists from the Georgian youth movement Kmaral, which spearheaded the protests last fall that culminated in Shevardnadze's ouster, have recently begun trying to mobilize the minority Georgian population of South Ossetia. Also on 20 May, participants in a meeting in the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, to mark the 12th anniversary of the killing by Georgian forces of Ossetian refugees adopted an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin and State Duma Chairman Boris Gryzlov to recognize South Ossetia as an independent state and then accept it as a member of the Russian Federation. The meeting participants stressed that only Russia can guarantee South Ossetia's security and create conditions for its economy to flourish. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PARTIES CALL FOR REJECTION OF ELECTRONIC VOTING

21 May

Five of Kazakhstan's 10 registered political parties -- Ak zhol (Bright Way), Auyl (Village), the Communists, Democratic Choice, and the Patriots' Party -- including centrist and opposition groups, have appealed to the parliament and government to change an article in recently adopted alterations to the election law that calls for introduction of an electronic system of voting. The appeal, which was distributed to the media by Ak zhol's press service, argued that the conducting of elections in Kazakhstan is not yet sufficiently transparent for the country to use electronic voting rather than paper ballots. The parties said they fear that electronic voting would be more susceptible to "all sorts

of manipulations." The appeal called for the funds intended for purchase of electronic voting machines to be used for urgent social needs, including providing computers to schools and modern medical equipment to hospitals. The cost of an electronic voting system for the whole of Kazakhstan has been estimated at 4.2 billion tenge (about \$32 million). Parliamentary elections are scheduled for this fall. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

HUGE PORTRAITS OF TURKMEN PRESIDENT BEING REMOVED

21 May

The Ashgabat mayor's office began removing a number of portraits of Saparmurat Niyazov from the facades of public buildings on 21 May and a bronze statue of Niyazov that had stood in front of the Interior Ministry was also taken down. Niyazov has often complained about the number of portraits of him displayed on buildings in Ashgabat and throughout the country, but these complaints usually have been the prelude to the installation of even more portraits and statues. The actions were reportedly on orders from Niyazov. The statues of Niyazov in front of the General Prosecutor's Office and the National Security Ministry remain, as does the large gold revolving figure atop the Arch of Neutrality in the center of the capital. (ITAR-TASS)

UZBEK OFFICIAL EXPLAINS WHY REGISTRATION DENIED FOR NGOS, PARTIES

21 May

The Uzbek Justice Ministry has completed the registration of international NGOs pursuant to new requirements of the law, Justice Minister Abdusamat Palvan-zade told a Friday news conference in Tashkent. He said that out of the 76 applicants, 73 had been registered and are functioning on a lawful basis. "They will keep all the tax breaks and customs benefits prescribed by the law," he said. However, several NGOs were officially warned about breaking the law. In particular, official warnings were given to the offices of the U.S. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and U.S. International Republican Institute. The minister said they had been maintaining regular contacts with politicized organizations and unregistered parties, namely Birlik and Erk whose operations contradict the current legislation. He said the office of the International Republican Institute took part in organizing the founding congress of the Ozod Dekhkonlar party while Freedom House circulated printed matter and videotapes with "slanted and subjective coverage of the political, social and economic situation in Uzbekistan and also made anti-constitutional calls." "The Developmental Institute of the Soros Foundation was denied registration due to crude breaches of the law," Palvan-zade said. The institute

"concealed many events from the registering authorities, its use of funds was not transparent, it published slanderous materials and engaged in other unfriendly actions damaging the image of the state," he added. He dismissed as groundless foreign media claims that his ministry has unjustifiably denied registration to Erk, Birlik and Ozod Dekhkonlar parties. He said Erk had not submitted any registration documents adding that its leader Muhammad Solih had been sentenced to 15 years in prison in absentia for organizing terrorist acts in 1999 among other things. As for the registration documents of Birlik and Ozod Dekhkhonlar, he said that they were not considered because of numerous falsifications of signatures of individuals "allegedly wishing to form a political party." (Interfax)

SOUTH OSSETIA HOLDS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

23 May

Parliamentary elections were held on 23 May in Georgia's breakaway, unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia. Preliminary returns show that the Unity Party of President Eduard Kokoity won a majority of 30 seats, half of which are distributed under the party list system and half in single-mandate constituencies. Four of the latter seats were reserved for the republic's Georgian population, but voting took place in only five predominantly Georgian-populated villages. On 21 May, South Ossetian Foreign Minister Murad Dzhiyev said that members of the Georgian youth movement Kmaral! (Enough!) will be denied entry to South Ossetia. On 22 May, Kokoity also likened the policies of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to those of radical nationalist former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who formally abolished the republic's autonomy. Kokoity affirmed that the people of South Ossetia remain committed to their pro-Russian orientation. Neither Georgia nor the international community recognize the polls as valid. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT ASKS U.S. FOR MORE OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF REFORMS

24 May

President Akaev asked during a 24 May meeting in Bishkek with U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Lynn Pascoe that the U.S. be "more objective" in assessing democratic reforms in Kyrgyzstan, presidential press service reported. Akaev denied that the reform process was being pursued so that Kyrgyzstan could obtain foreign aid, but rather because it was in the interests of the "young Kyrgyz state." Pascoe reportedly said that the U.S. sees Kyrgyzstan as a model in the process of political and economic reform in Central Asia. (RIA-Novosti)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT INSISTS NO ONE IS PERSECUTED FOR BELIEFS

24 May

Speaking at the opening of Turkmenistan's first paper mill on 21 May, President Niyazov insisted that no one in the country is persecuted or has been imprisoned because of his political

convictions. He also told members of the diplomatic corps attending the opening ceremony in the village of Yashlyk, about 45 kilometers east of Ashgabat, that petty crime is almost nonexistent in Turkmenistan, and that all levels of the population, public organizations, trade unions, workers, and civil servants are united around one goal -- the protection of the homeland and its development. He cited the absence of serious crime such as murder and theft as proof that the lives of the people have improved. While Niyazov has made similar assertions on other occasions, this time his remarks, in combination with the removal the same day of his portraits in Ashgabat, indicates an unusual defensiveness in the normally self-assured Niyazov. (RFE/R)

US DENIES STRAYING INTO PAKISTAN

24 May

The US military in Afghanistan has denied making an incursion across the border into Pakistan in pursuit of al-Qaeda militants last week. The Americans accept that their troops strayed into the Pakistani part of a border village early in May but deny repeating the action on Thursday. Pakistan has warned that any US incursions are "totally unacceptable". The two allies are waging separate campaigns against al-Qaeda militants operating along the remote border. US troops did enter the village of Lowara Mandi, which straddles the border between the Afghan province of Khost and the Pakistani territory of North Waziristan, on 5 May. But spokesman Lt Col Tucker Mansager said on Monday there had been no incursions across the poorly marked frontier since then. "We have researched these allegations thoroughly and can report without a doubt that coalition forces are conducting operations on the Afghan side of the border only," he said in the Afghan capital Kabul. Pakistan, he added, was a "valued partner in the global war on terrorism" and the US respected its "sovereign rights... as a nation". Amid Pakistani reports of the latest incursion, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri warned on Sunday that incursions could provoke hostile tribesmen in the area and result in "a very big incident". (BBC)

TWO FIELD COMMANDERS BEHIND MAY 9 ATTACK KILLED IN CHECHNYA

24 May

Two field commanders involved in the organization of the May 9 terrorist attack in Grozny have been killed on the outskirts of Grozny, spokesman for the headquarters of the federal forces in the North Caucasus Col. Ilya Shabalkin told Interfax on Monday. Shabalkin said that a group of five rebels had been discovered in a search effort by federal forces in the southwestern outskirts of Grozny. "They were told to surrender but the rebels opened fire and attempted to flee. Three of them were killed in the ensuing shootout and the others fled," he said. He said two federal servicemen had been slightly wounded. One of those killed was identified as field commander Said- Emin Elikhanov, born in 1980, and another was a Wahhabi leader from the of Urus-Martan district, Taus Udayev, born in 1978. Investigators are still

attempting to identify the third rebel. Shabalkin said three Kalashnikov assault rifles with partly filled magazines, four grenades, a homemade bomb and some 500 cartridges were found at the scene of the clash. (Interfax)

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN TO BE LAUNCHED IN CHECHNYA

24 May

The presidential election campaign in Chechnya will begin on May 25. Chechnya will hold early presidential elections on August 29 because of the death of Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov in the terrorist act at Grozny's Dynamo stadium on May 9. The Chechen elections commission will begin receiving documents from future candidates on Tuesday, commission deputy head Buvai-Sari Arsakhanov told Interfax. Chechnya does not have weekly newspapers and a resolution announcing the election date will be published there only on May 25. Starting from that day, those who want to run can inform the election commission in writing about their intention to collect signatures from voters or make an election deposit. The election deposit costs 4.5 million rubles. The money of candidates who fail to get 5% of the vote will go to the Chechen budget, Arsakhanov said. (Interfax)

U.S. CALLS FOR CHANGES TO TAJIK ELECTION LAW

25 May

Douglas Davidson, deputy chief of the U.S. mission to the OSCE, called on Tajikistan's parliament on 25 May to make changes to the country's election law. Speaking at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, Davidson urged changes that "will strengthen Tajikistan's reputation as a country that guarantees political pluralism." The American Embassy in Dushanbe told the news agency that adding such elements as independent electoral commissions and provisions for election observers will bring the country's election law closer to international standards. Davidson also suggested that Tajik lawmakers consult closely with OSCE election experts in efforts to fashion a new election law. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

CONFUSION SURROUNDS RUSSIAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM TAJIKISTAN

26 May

Russian troops began to withdraw from the Khorugh and Kulob sections of the Tajik-Afghan border on 24 May, Tajik Radio reported the next day. There is widespread confusion over what is actually happening along the border, where Russian troops are scheduled to begin handing over control to Tajik forces later this year. Russia's "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 25 May that Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov has called reports of a complete Russian withdrawal from Tajikistan "total nonsense," while Sabza Sarkorov, deputy chairman of the Tajik State Border Committee, more specifically denied that Russian troops are being withdrawn from the border. The source of the current confusion appears

to be the lack of a specific schedule for the handover, which has been the subject of difficult negotiations between the two countries. (RFE/RL)

TWO ARMENIAN OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS RELEASED, ONE SENTENCED

27 May

Two senior Artarutian members who were taken into custody following the violent dispersal by police early on 13 April of participants in a peaceful rally calling for the resignation of President Robert Kocharian were released late on 25 May, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported the following day. Aramazd Zakarian and Zhora Sapayan, both members of the Hanrapetutian party, admitted to having "publicly insulted" senior government officials. Also on 25 May, a local court sentenced 24-year-old Edgar Arakelian to 18 months' imprisonment for having thrown a plastic bottle at a police officer during the clash between demonstrators and police on 13 April. (RFE/RL)

DRUG CONTROL AGENCY OPENS IN KYRGYZ CAPITAL

27 May

The Drug Control Agency was opened in Bishkek on 26 May in a ceremony attended by Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Antonio Maria Costa, and U.S. Ambassador Stephen Young. In his remarks, Tanaev noted that 30-35 tons of narcotics pass through Kyrgyzstan each year, and half of the traffic is opium that originates in Afghanistan. The prime minister expressed the hope that the new agency will help the state to implement its antidrug policies. Costa also met with Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev on 26 May. Akaev warned that the drug threat from Afghanistan is becoming "more acute." At a meeting with First Deputy Foreign Minister Talant Kushchubekov, also on 26 May, Costa called the opening of the Drug Control Agency an important measure to combat the burgeoning cross-border Afghan-Kyrgyz drug trade. The Drug Control Agency will receive funding from the Kyrgyz government, the United Nations, and the United States. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT CALLS FOR SPEEDIER INTEGRATION

27 May

President Nursultan Nazarbaev said on 27 May that the states of the Eurasian Economic Community (EES) must hasten their efforts to harmonize national legislation in order to aid overall integration. The remarks came at a meeting with the head of parliamentary delegations from the EES states (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan). Nazarbaev said, "Our task is to harmonize national laws and bring them closer together. Specific goals have been set to synchronize the ratification of the agreements and accords that have been signed." Anatolii Maryshev, the executive secretary of the EES Interparliamentary Assembly, told a 27

May news conference that the Interparliamentary Assembly meeting scheduled for 28 May will focus on laws to aid cooperation in the transportation, energy, and customs sectors; the laws will then be ratified and adopted by national parliaments. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

TAJIK WOMEN SAY HUSBANDS, SONS ENDURE TORTURE

27 May

The wives and mothers of suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir members in custody told a 26 May news conference that their husbands and children are being tortured. The NGO Fourth Power organized the news conference in Khujand, where 14 suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir members were arrested on 9 February. Parvona Firuz of Fourth Power told Asia-Plus, "The suspects' mothers said that the detainees had been tortured, beaten, and humiliated during the first months their detention in order to force them to plead guilty." The women have drawn up an appeal that they intend to pass on to President Rakhmonov. (Asia-Plus Blitz)

CENTRAL ASIAN LEADERS SAY AFGHANISTAN MUST FIGHT DRUGS

May 28

The problem of drug trafficking from Afghanistan needs to be resolved within Afghanistan itself, said Uzbek and Tajik Presidents Islam Karimov and Emomali Rakhmonov. "Until this problem is resolved in Afghanistan itself, and until Afghanistan earmarks money to discourage the population from producing opium, no solution can be found. All these barriers that we are erecting are a secondary thing," Karimov said at a Friday press conference in Astana, following a regular meeting of the Central Asian Cooperation organization heads of state. The organization is made up of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Uzbek president noted that despite the activity of the antiterrorist coalition in Afghanistan, drug production in that country and the traffic of drugs from it are increasing. Certain estimates indicate that revenues from drug production in Afghanistan exceed \$3.5 billion a year, Karimov said. "This money, in particular, finances the terrorist and bandit units," he said.

President Rakhmonov told the press conference that "according to the estimates of UN experts, opium production in Afghanistan has grown 2.5 times since the beginning of the antiterrorist operation there."

"Some member-states of the antiterrorist coalition in Afghanistan say their job is to eliminate bin Laden and Mulla Omar, while drug contraband is not their problem. This is a mistake, because the prime source for financing terrorism and extremism is the production of drugs," Rakhmonov said. "The drug problem is not only a problem of our region and Afghanistan. This is as global a problem as the problem of terrorism and extremism. This problem should be nipped in the bud," Rakhmonov said. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

TWENTY CHECHEN REBELS KILLED OVER PAST 3 DAYS

29 May

The Chechen guerilla units have lost up to 20 people over the past three days, said spokesman for the regional headquarters for the antiterrorist operation in the North Caucasus Col. Ilya Shabalkin.

On May 26, federal forces launched special operations to hunt down guerillas led by warlords Abdullayev and Tasuyev in the Shali, Shatoi, and Vedenov districts in southern Chechnya.

"Such serious operations were launched after information was received from rebels who had been detained or gave up earlier," Shabalkin said. In addition, federal forces laid ambushes in the Shatoi district and neutralized dispersed rebel units retreating from the areas where the operations were carried out, he said. "Since the operation was started, 20 rebels have been killed and 12 Kalashnikov assault rifles, 6 light machine-guns, 15 light grenade launchers, 2 Makarov pistols, 57 grenades, 12 homemade explosive devices, 5,000 cartridges for Kalashnikov rifles, and 732 cartridges for Makarov pistols have been confiscated," Shabalkin said. "In addition, several rebel bases, each capable of accommodating from 15 to 20 people, were revealed and destroyed," he said. Local residents, particularly farmers and shepherds, provided significant assistance in conducting these operations by telling the federal forces where rebel groups were moving, Shabalkin said. "The aviation and artillery delivered strikes upon the designated areas," he said. "No servicemen were killed, but three people from the Vostok battalion commanded by Sulim Yamadayev suffered wounds," he said. "On Friday morning, the operations in these districts were finished, and the troops were returned to their permanent bases," Shabalkin said. Meanwhile, a law enforcement source told Interfax that about 20 members of illegal armed units and also people suspected of having committed grave crimes and placed on the federal wanted list have been detained over these days. (Interfax)

US TROOPS KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

30 May

Four US soldiers have been killed in action in southern Afghanistan, the US military says. The deaths occurred in the province of Zabul, which has seen regular attacks by Islamic militants. "Four US service members assigned to the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan were killed in action today...," the statement said. "Names will not be released until notification of next of kin is complete," it added. The US military says the four died when an explosive device detonated under the military vehicle - a Humvee - that they were travelling in approximately 30 kilometres east of Qalat. The deaths represent one of the biggest losses for American forces since they began operations in Afghanistan more than two years ago. The attacks have been blamed on remnants of the former Taleban regime. The US military acknowledges that an insurgency in the south and east of the country has gathered pace - more than 700 people are said to have died in violence in

Afghanistan since last August. Suspected Taleban militants have attacked Afghan government targets in the southern province of Helmand, killing at least seven Afghan soldiers. Local officials said four Taleban fighters were also killed and a number captured during the clashes at Musa Qala early on Sunday. Correspondents say there were several apparently coordinated raids on government buildings and military and police posts. (BBC)

SON OF LATE CHECHEN PRESIDENT KADYROV FOUND DEAD

31 May

The elder son of the late Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov, 29 year-old Zelimkhan Kadyrov, was found dead on Monday in his home in the settlement of Tsentoroi, a source in the Chechen Health Ministry told Interfax.

According to the ministry's data, the cause of death has not yet been determined. At the same time, the source said that "there were no signs of a violent death."

Kadyrov's funeral will take place on Tuesday in Tsentoroi. He will be buried next to his father, Akhmad Kadyrov, who was killed in a terrorist attack on May 9 in Grozny. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJAN, IRAN AGREE ON GAS SUPPLIES

31 May

Azerbaijan and Iran have reached agreement on supplies of Iranian natural gas to Nakhichevan autonomous republic, Azerbaijani Economic Development Minister Farhad Aliyev told journalists on Friday. "We have reached an agreement. In place of the gas we will supply them with electricity. The negotiation process is already drawing to a close and an agreement will be signed soon," Aliyev said. The proposed volume of gas imports from Iran is 350 million cubic meters per year. Azerbaijan proposes two schemes to pay for the gas - either with Azerbaijani electricity, or gas - but starting in 2006-2007 when the Shah Deniz field is launched. The Iranian side initially insisted on cash payment for the gas. To supply gas from Iran to Nakhichevan it will be necessary to build a gas pipeline and reconstruct the gas system in the autonomous republic. This work is estimated at \$15-\$20 million. Nakhichevan autonomous republic does not have direct road links with the main part of Azerbaijan and the main links are by air. Electricity is supplied to the republic from Iran and Turkey. (Interfax)

KAKHA BENDUKIDZE APPOINTED GEORGIAN ECONOMICS MINISTER

1 June

Businessman Kakha Bendukidze, who lives and works in Russia, has been appointed Georgia's economics minister, Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania said in Tbilisi on Tuesday. Bendukidze's appointment was coordinated with President Mikheil Saakashvili, Zhvania said.

"He is an economist on a global scale. Bendukidze has very good relations with all the world's leading economic centers," the prime minister said. Asked whether Bendukidze, who is general director of United Heavy Machinery (Uralmash-

Izhora Group), is going to invest in Georgia's economy, the prime minister said that "naturally, the minister will not be able to invest his own money in the enterprises under his control." Saakashvili called Bendukidze "a true patriot of Georgia" while speaking at the Georgian-Russian economic forum in Tbilisi on Monday evening. (Interfax)

BOTAS TO FINISH TURKISH SECTION OF BTC PIPE ON TIME

1 June

Turkey's Botas, the operator for the construction of the Turkish section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, plans to complete this section on time - in December 2004- January 2005, company General Director Mehmet Bilgic told journalists in Baku on Monday. He said steps have been taken to make up for delays. "At the moment any delays are not being discussed. The Turkish government has set Botas the task of completing construction on time, and we will do everything possible for this," he said. The Botas chief said that some delays are natural in a project of this scale. "Our aim is to complete the construction process on time for the agreed amount of \$1.4 billion. Here, any deviation is not even up for discussion," Bilgic said. The future pipeline will stretch 1,767 kilometers (443 km through Azerbaijan, 248 km through Georgia and 1,076 km through Turkey) and will have a capacity of 50 million tonnes of oil per annum. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project will cost \$3.6 billion. Participants in the BTC project are: British Petroleum (30.1%), SOCAR (25%), Unocal (8.9%), Statoil (8.71%), TPAO (6.53%), ENI (5%), Itochu (3.4%), ConocoPhillips (2.5%), Inpex (2.5%), TotalFinaElf (5%), and Amerada Hess (2.36%). BTC signed a contract with Botas to build the Turkish section of the pipeline, costing \$1.4 billion. (Interfax)

US AGAINST KAZAKHSTAN-IRAN OIL PIPELINE PLAN: OFFICIAL

1 June

A top US diplomat underlined Washington's opposition to a French-backed plan which, if realised, would see a pipeline built from Kazakhstan to Iran to export the massive oil reserves underneath the Caspian Sea. "The US is firmly opposed to this pipeline, for reasons both of law and policy," Steven Mann, the US special envoy on Caspian basin energy issues, told reporters. "Commercially speaking, I think there are better alternatives," added Mann, who was speaking on the sidelines of the annual Caspian Oil and Gas conference in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. Kazakhstan's government, together with French oil major Total, has been studying the feasibility of building a pipeline to ship crude from Kazakhstan to Iran, and from there to tanker terminals on the Persian Gulf. However, the idea has angered Washington. It has identified Iran as part of an "axis of evil" and has banned US companies from doing business with Iran's clerical regime. The Caspian Sea -- and especially Kazakhstan's sector -- is home to some of the world's largest untapped oil reserves. It is estimated that there are up to 33 billion barrels of crude under the seabed, which is twice the

size of the reserves in the North Sea. The landlocked Caspian has attracted the attention of investors who want to diversify oil supplies away from the Middle East, which, they say, is vulnerable to political instability. Washington has backed the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which will export Caspian oil west across Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, to the Mediterranean Sea. That project is due to be completed by the middle of next year. However, some in the oil industry say the southern route, through Iran, is shorter and commercially more attractive. (AFP)

UN WARNING ON AFGHANISTAN OPIUM

1 June

The head of the United Nations drugs control agency has told the BBC that efforts to tackle Afghanistan's growing drugs trade are failing. Antonio Maria Costa said that the country would face a dangerous future if it was not brought under control. According to Mr Costa, up to 90% of the opium from Afghanistan's poppy fields is turned into heroin inside the country's borders. Most of the heroin consumed in Britain originates from Afghanistan. The executive director of

the UN Office on Drugs and Crime has warned about the threat from the Afghan drugs trade before. But on his latest visit to the country Antonio Maria Costa said the problem was getting ever more serious, despite international efforts - led by Britain - to tackle it. Some drug profits may be going to terrorists, and although it is officially illegal, opium production is growing more widely than ever. Poverty among farmers is often seen as one of the causes. Mr Costa accepts it plays a role, but he says there are more important factors. "The problem is becoming ever more serious," he said. "Cultivation is spreading and eradication measures undertaken by the government are not succeeding. "Corruption is widespread and it is a major lubricant for trafficking and illegal activities such as money-laundering." But many of the police commanders Mr Costa met over the past few days said they did not have the resources or the manpower to fight the drugs traffickers. That is why Mr Costa is calling for a reappraisal of the way the Afghan authorities and their international backers deal with the problem. (BBC)

