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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/September 22, 2004

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In a move that is likely to complicate Azerbaijan's relations with NATO, Baku moved to block the participation of Armenian officers in the NATO Partnership for Peace exercise Co-operative Best Effort 2004, which was scheduled for this month. On September 13, the NATO Command cancelled the exercise and issued an official statement regretting that "the principle of inclusiveness could not be upheld." This was a culmination of the dispute between Azerbaijan and NATO over Armenia's participation.

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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.

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THE IRAN-ARMENIA PIPELINE: FINALLY COMING TO LIFE

Hooman Peimani

After about three years of its signing in 2001, the Iranian and Armenian governments have finally initiated the process to implement a 142-km gas pipeline agreement. Accordingly, Armenia will receive 1,500,000 cubic meters of gas from Iran per day once the pipeline goes on stream. Two Russian energy companies (ArmeRuss Gazprom and Gazprom) have started a feasibility study on the project for which a group of their engineers visited in August the Armenian region through which the pipeline will pass. As stated in July by Armenian President Robert Kocharian, the project is of great importance to Yerevan.

BACKGROUND: Being surrounded from three sides by hostile or unreliable neighbors, the operational pipeline will meet Armenia's gas requirements from a friendly neighboring supplier, while significantly increasing Iran's gas exports now mainly limited to its uncertain exports to Turkey. The pipeline, which could be extended to Georgia and Ukraine, could go even farther to reach Central and Western Europe via Ukraine. If fully implemented, this will not only increase Iran's gas exports substantially, but it will drastically boost the importance of Armenia and Georgia and, by default, the South Caucasus, as a main export route for fossil energy to supply the European economies. Armenian-Iranian relations have been on the expansion track since Armenia's independence in 1991 for various reasons. Against a background of historical ties and the existence of Iranians of Armenian origins who have kept a degree of contact over centuries between the two nations even during the Soviet era, political realities, economic imperatives and security considerations have inclined Yerevan and Tehran to seek close relations. Being a landlocked country, Armenia's surrounding by two hostile countries (Azerbaijan and Turkey) to its east and west and an unreliable neighbour (Georgia) to the north makes its southern neighbour (Iran) the only reliable outlet for accessing the open seas and regional and international markets, added to its need for importing fossil energy from a secure supplier. Concerned about the resumption of war with Azerbaijan over the disputed Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno Karabakh with a possibility of dragging Turkey into the conflict, Armenia also needs Iran's close and friendly relations as a regional power to deter such scenario. As for Iran, close and cordial relations with the three Caucasian states have been important as, besides economic interests in the Caucasus, the region provides a land link between Iran and Europe, a necessity for the Iranians to reduce their heavy reliance on Turkey for that matter. Preventing the region's domination by hostile America has also been another incentive for Tehran to forge friendly ties with the regional countries. Given the extensive and growing relations, including military ones, between Washington and Baku and Tbilisi, close ties with Yerevan, which has sought strong relations with both Tehran and Moscow while having friendly relations with Washington, is of special importance for the Iranian government.

IMPLICATIONS: Against this background, the interest of both Armenia and Iran for constructing a gas pipeline is quite understandable. Lacking any significant fossil energy resources, Iran is the most logical long-term supplier of gas and oil for Armenia whose exports to that country does not require the consent of Armenia's other neighbours. The possibility of the pipeline's continuation to Georgia and Ukraine – both of which have already expressed an interest in the scenario – creates an additional motivation for the Armenians who could economically benefit of such scenario by providing a major, and potentially the major, route for Iran's gas exports, while creating stakes for Georgia in maintaining good ties with their southern neighbour. Moreover, its potential to become a pipeline to supply the European Union (EU) with Iranian gas makes its construction even more interesting for the Armenians. The EU has been keen on importing gas from Iran as a means to secure adequate number of suppliers for its increasing gas requirements, to diversify its gas suppliers and thus to reduce its heavy reliance on Russia and certain North African countries for its gas imports. Brussels has given serious thoughts, including a feasibility studies undertaken over a year ago, about connecting the existing Iranian-Turkish gas pipeline to Europe via Greece and/or Bulgaria. Various factors, including Ankara's twice closure of the pipeline since its inauguration in 1993 because of its disputes with Tehran over the amount and pricing its gas imports, and Brussels' political considerations, have prevented the project's realization. In the absence of those considerations and provided the prevalence of durable peace in the Caucasus, the Caucasian export route could have a better chance to become a reality if the current Turkish-Iranian disagreements on gas exports continue.

CONCLUSIONS: The recent enthusiasm of Yerevan and Tehran for constructing the gas pipeline and the involvement of two Russian gas companies in the initial phase of its implementation are good signs as they create hope for its actual construction. However, in the absence of a firm construction schedule, it is still a little too early to consider the recent developments as a clear sign for the project's implementation. There is no question that both the Armenians and the Iranians are determined to make this happen, while having the blessing of the Russians as reflected in the mentioned involvement of their gas companies.

Russia's potentially troublesome ties with Georgia make it an unlikely long-term supplier of gas and oil to Armenia as it can only access the latter via Georgia, given the hostile state of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia whose future is anyone's guess. This explains Moscow's backing of the project. Nevertheless, the recent positive developments are still inadequate factors for the project's rapid implementation as demonstrated in the shelving or long delays in the implementation of many energy projects in the Caspian region such as those involving Iran and its neighbours.

Developments in the next few months, including clear announcements on the availability of funds and a construction schedule, will certainly reveal whether the Caucasus will become a potential major route for Iran's energy exports or the Iranian-Armenian gas pipeline will turn into a pipe dream.

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SOUTH OSSETIA JOURNAL, PART TWO: RETURNING TO AN UNCLEAR FUTURE

According to government records, by the time of the cease-fire, 294 homes had been damaged in Didi and Patara Liakhvi and 21 either destroyed or with extensive damage. The total projected cost for reconstruction amounts to \$300,000. (The cost to rebuild an entire home is approximately \$12,000). Some villagers complained that the value of the damages was underestimated. One Tamarasheni resident, pointing out structural damage to his home (valued at \$1200), explained repairs would amount to at least \$5000.

Security issues and freedom of movement remain an important concern for returning residents. Georgians complain that they cannot go to Tskhinvali, mainly out of fear of being detained or beaten. They claim, "If Georgians go to Tskhinvali and speak Russian or Ossetian, they will be fine. If they speak Georgian, they will be in trouble.... They say they cannot guarantee our safety if we go to Tskhinvali, so we avoid it." Consequently, to be safe, residents use a diversion road, bypassing Tskhinvali. However, this will not be usable during the winter months and may cause serious humanitarian concerns for residents if roads are blocked in the future by Ossetian authorities.

Ossetians are reportedly still delivering arms and digging trenches around strategic villages. Didi Liakhvi residents are afraid to leave the main road running through villages, claiming snipers remain in the hills. During one visit, they pointed at Ossetians digging trenches above them. Vanati residents fear the same from the cliffs above, where Ossetians reportedly shelled them. Indeed, one convoy carrying representatives from the international community and foreign journalists attempting to visit Sarabuki, an Ossetian village, was abruptly forced to end its further scheduled visits after armed Ossetians harassed them (apparently because they may have gotten too close to Ossetian positions). One person was forced to clear their camera of photos.

Further, Russian peacekeepers stationed at the Vanati checkpoint (to provide security and to prevent the escalation of the conflict) allow Ossetian police from Dmenisi village to stand with them—clearly demonstrating a lack of neutrality. Several Patara Likhvi residents have claimed that residents are consistently stopped by the Ossetian police and forced to pay a bribe to pass—and do so in front of the Russians, who reportedly "turn a blind eye." Georgian residents are now in a difficult situation since they need to pass the checkpoint to gather wood for the winter, with fuel already in short supply.

Having defended villages during the conflict, police (and locals) are concerned that they will be targeted by Ossetians. They point to several random detentions and two serious beatings (one man appeared to have been tortured) to confirm this fear. Georgians are afraid to publicly complain about such events, particularly to the media, fearing retaliation. One Tamarasheni resident explained, "We are shaking. It's like having nails stuck in your fingers. No words can explain how it feels to live here."

Meanwhile, only 12 days remained until school is scheduled to begin. Families are afraid to send their children to damaged schools (Tamarasheni and Vanati schools were direct targets in the conflict) and may send their children to stay with relatives for the year. The Vanati school director, Julietta Khaduri, said she will keep her 10-year old daughter in school as a positive example to other families.

Many houses are without roofs and windows, and several have gaping holes in their walls. Consequently, several family members are forced to share small rooms. And winter is fast approaching. Parents are worried about the psychological effects the conflict will have on their children. Many had to endure nightly shelling. Others witness soldiers die in front of their eyes. Returning children will now have to endure nightly rounds of light shooting in the

air. Families are concerned, but have no place to turn. Moreover, conflict zone residents are financially strapped with no source of income following the closure of the Ergneti black market. They complain that the prospect of jobs and future income needs to be addressed.

Guram Vakhtangashvili, a local member of parliament, pointed out that he feels children and women are safe to return, but noted, "who knows what will happen in the future. This territory is uncontrollable."

The regional governor, Mikheil Kareli said "the conflict is not over. The conflict will continue until there is a settlement". When asked what the Georgian government wants in the settlement, he replied that Saakashvili offered full autonomous republic status to the South Ossetians.

Meanwhile, Tamarasheni school, heavily damaged throughout the conflict, experienced light shelling on the evening of 7 September, in what may be a warning to returning residents.

In sum, South Ossetia conflict zone residents are returning to an unstable environment. Despite evidence of peace, there is no guarantee for residents' safety. Many are ready to run if the shooting continues. Hopefully, the Georgian authorities' recent experience will enable them to more adequately care for evacuating residents, if necessary. For as long as the Saakashvili's aims are to reestablish Georgia's territorial integrity, the likelihood of the conflict re-erupting remains high. Nonetheless, the return of children to Georgian villages provides a powerful symbol to the Ossetian population that Saakashvili mean peace. Importantly, prompt reconstruction and humanitarian efforts demonstrate that the Georgian authorities have the ability to respond quickly to emergency situations. Meanwhile, winter is fast approaching and many humanitarian and security concerns have yet to be addressed.

Theresa Freese

MEDIA AND ELECTIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Olivia Allison

Kazakhstan's Information Minister Altynbek Sarsanbaiuly, the only opposition member of the presidential administration, resigned from his post in protest Sept. 20, saying the Sept. 19 election for the lower house of parliament had serious shortcomings, including seriously biased media. This result has cast a negative shadow on Central Asia's election-time media environment, which began with these elections. Over the course of the next year, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are all set to hold parliamentary or presidential elections, or both, in 2005. In all Central Asian countries, serious pressure on the media has already begun, and appears to intensify.

BACKGROUND: Sarsanbaiuly's resignation was the final step in a long line of strong statements against corruption and media bias toward pro-presidential parties in the run-up to Kazakhstan's parliamentary elections. In particular, he criticized stations owned by President Nursultan Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga, including Khabar and KTK, presenting monitoring results that show these stations' extreme bias in favor of the pro-governmental parties Otan and Asar, while Channel 31 was found to be least biased by a Western-sponsored monitoring project during the campaign. Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, lost its popular independent TV station Pyramida, when station management sold shares to a government affiliate late this summer. Presently, Kyrgyzstan has no prospect of an independent TV station during upcoming local, parliamentary and presidential elections, one Western media observer said.

Although Tajikistan's parliamentary elections are still months off, the government is crudely persecuting the main print media outlets in the capital, Dushanbe. Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party's printing press was closed Aug. 18, ostensibly for tax reasons, effectively stopping the distribution of the opposition papers *Nerui Sukhan* and *Ruzi Nav*, as well as the IRP's own newspaper. This occurred shortly after *Ruzi Nav* editor Radjabi Mirzo was beaten outside his home.

Uzbekistan's parliamentary elections, which will begin in December, have also prompted a new round of clamping down on media. The media-support organization Internews Uzbekistan has been suspended by court order for six months; its international counterpart, Internews Network, now faces another inspection; and five of Internews' partner TV stations were stripped of broadcasting licenses in August. Internews Uzbekistan's director Khalida Anarbaeva last week called these actions "a tactic to stop the functioning of non-state media before this year's elections".

These types of pressures resemble Kazakhstan's pre-election media persecution, when oppositional newspaper *Assandi Times* was shut down through a prominent and expensive libel case. Central Asian governments' behavior sets a pattern making sure the media is pressured or owned by pro-government figures, so as to stop coverage of election irregularities.

IMPLICATIONS: From a more open media environment in 1991, Central Asian presidents have increasingly pressured the media, as they have attempted to remain in power

past their term limits—only Tajikistan has so far elected a president aside from the last Soviet-era leader. The examples cited above show the variety of steps Central Asian governments take in tightening their grip on the media environment. However, several subtle and more systematic tactics have also emerged to play a significant and lasting role in Central Asian media's reality, including election legislation regulating media coverage and selective enforcement of other media laws.

Central Asian governments recently adopted laws to control the media. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan adopted similar election laws in the past year, both of which guarantee candidates "equal access" to media. These stipulations have been criticized by free-speech activists, who say these regulations decrease editorial independence, but some international political organizations say these laws close the gap between pro- and anti-governmental parties' access to media. An Almaty-based Kazakhstani media lawyer said in an interview in May that this was a positive law "in theory," but doubted these rules would be enforced fairly.

During Kazakhstan's recent campaign season, these election code stipulations and Central Election Commission regulations seemed a positive development, giving opposition politicians legal basis for complaints about access to media. The NGO Elections and Democracy conducted monitoring showing the media's significant bias in favor of pro-presidential candidates, prompting some outcry from opposition and free-speech activists.

Kyrgyzstan's election law is more restrictive, as it forbids campaigning "through foreign media," a vague clause which could affect Russian-based newspapers that have Kyrgyzstan supplements, as well as popular Western-supported radio programs like BBC and Radio Liberty. "It's pretty clear that this restriction has been put in place to paralyze the work of independent journalists during the elections," Kuban Mambetaliev, director of the Public Association of Journalists, wrote on Sept. 10. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan's election code forbids the publication of "opinion polls, election forecasts and other research linked to elections," potentially forbidding the publication of the monitoring like Kazakhstan's, which prompted so much debate.

Tajikistan has yet to pass a new election code. In Uzbekistan, a working group for parliamentary journalists will serve as a partial control mechanism during elections. Furthermore, no opposition parties are registered, so the election campaign will be less active than in the other three countries.

Throughout Central Asia, media laws are enforced selectively and tactically, as the Tajikistan tax situation indicates. While tax fraud occurs widely because businesses face a long line of taxes too expensive to pay, tax officials usually initiate inspections after a media outlet has offended a governmental official or brought up sensitive issues. Kazakhstan's situation is better than elsewhere, as the value-added tax has been suspended for media outlets since 1995.

Licensing and registration are also carried out selectively. Uzbekistan's government has refused to register new media outlets for months and Kyrgyzstan's broadcast licensing has completely come to a halt this year. Media outlets needing to renew their licenses are only receiving three-month extensions, rather than the normal two-year licenses, which will keep the television and radio on a short leash. Tajikistan has not licensed any independent stations in its capital, Dushanbe, although an application from media holding Asia Plus has been under consideration for three years.

Kazakhstan's frequency licensing procedure has become more transparent in recent years, although the competitive nature of licensing implies that stations with the most resources and political connections are at an advantage.

Libel, defamation and "protection of dignity and honor" cases are often filed by governmental figures in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan against oppositional or critical media outlets. This trend has finally caught on in Tajikistan, which had experienced no such cases until this spring. Now, two defamation cases are under consideration.

CONCLUSIONS: Central Asian problems mirror declining press freedom in other post-Soviet republics, particularly Russian, where the government has been closing the most independent-minded television stations and political programming for several years, establishing what Oleg Panfilov calls "an authoritarian regime with a docile press that will not challenge the President".

Kazakhstan's media faced an easier time this year than in 1999, one Kazakhstani media observer said, because the government was more assured of success in these presidential elections. The less confident a government is of success in democratic elections, the more likely it is to harshly clamp down, the observer said. Mechanisms for limiting press freedom—like these media and election laws—have been set up years in advance, and are likely to be used more systematically in other countries during elections, as the present regimes struggle to retain power.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Olivia Allison is an independent writer currently traveling Central Asia.

DOMESTIC TERRORISM ACCUMULATES NATIONALIST INTOLERANCE AMONG RUSSIAN PUBLIC

Terrorist attacks on two Russian planes, a series of bombings in the center of Moscow and the Beslan massacre in the past few weeks increased public awareness among Russians about homeland security. However, it also brought a new wave of violent crimes against foreigners carried out by the country's illegal racist movements.

With general criticism of Putin's policy in Chechnya, opinion among the Russian public split into two camps. Some revile against military actions in Chechnya, demanding a halt to the bloody fight and the withdrawal of troops. Others believe that measures taken to defend the government's position in the conflict are not tough enough and that President Vladimir Putin must show more decisive actions in fighting terrorism domestically and abroad.

The recent shocking hostage crisis in Russia's southern city Beslan stirred the activity of illegal nationalist movements. Soon after the events, a number of attacks by racist groups went off in various Russian cities against people of Caucasian and Asian nationalities. On September 18, a group of about fifty teenagers severely beat three foreigners from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan inside the Moscow subway. A week after the Beslan tragedy, one Armenian was killed and two severely beaten by members of an illegal organization in Yekaterinburg oblast.

According to the Moscow Bureau for Human Rights, about 50,000 members are involved in various racist movements, and the number is growing every year. The recent terrorist acts accumulated xenophobic feelings not only among radical movements comprised mostly of teenagers, but also impacted ordinary

citizens. Nationalist intolerance increased among Russians in recent years as Chechnya's protracted crisis seems to have reached a stalemate. The inability of the Russian government to alleviate the armed conflict poses a challenge for anyone in the civilian population to become a next victim of suicide bombers or hostage takers. Intolerance is expressed in boycotting markets with migrant merchants and restraining from contact with foreigners in public places.

Today Russian official statistics reckons that about five million migrants from 91 different states are working in Russia without legal status. 60% of them are CIS natives, mostly from the South Caucasus and Central Asian states, and some from Belarus and Ukraine. Migrants annually send about US\$13-15 billion in remittances to their countries of origin, the Russian Ministry of Interior estimates.

Seasonal workers have become a major source of cheap labor in western Russia. The Russian government knows that labor migrants entail mutual economic benefits and that there are regions in the country where additional manpower is urgently needed. Migrant inflows also represent a positive trend in the country's declining demographic index. Experts from the Russian Academy of Science say that the country lacks a clear concept for immigration in conditions when the native population is decreasing by 800,000 people every year.

Legislation to control migration processes includes only basic regulations. More flexible interstate agreements are necessary for states where migrants' annual remittances from Russia take up significant shares of national economies. Among them, Tajikistan,

Azerbaijan, and to a lesser extent Armenia lack elaborated bilateral standards of legal registration. Visa regimes with Uzbekistan and Georgia represent a significant barrier for human migration. The upcoming passport reform in Tajikistan will complicate procedural requirements for Tajik migrants. Beginning next year, Tajik passports will be issued for five years instead of ten and require an additional permission to leave the country. The situation with legal regulation of migrants from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan is more advanced due to proliferation of ties with Russia in economic, political and military spheres.

There is a noticeable increase of internal security control after the Beslan events, as law enforcement agencies are put on high alert in persecuting possible suspected Chechen fighters. Often ordinary migrants are unaware of their own rights while dealing with security structures. For many, the rights are limited due to an inability to receive official registration. Lack of a legal status and elaborated immigration regulations force migrants to bribe militiamen and border guards.

Violence against foreigners in Russia increased among local nationalist movements after a series of terrorist incidents. Often labor migrants with non-European or "Chechen-like" appearances first fall victims to such movements. However, the recent brutal siege in Beslan brought public frustration to a different level, leading ordinary people to seek personal safety by avoiding contact with foreigners.

Erica Marat

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM AND ELECTIONS IN UZBEKISTAN

Aftab Kazi

Parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan late this year will replace the existing Oliy Majlis with a bicameral Parliamentary system as planned during the last national elections. Uzbekistan's gradual political development strategy reflects processes inherent in the considered levels of its political culture and relevant changing phases. A nationwide pre-Parliamentary public awareness educational campaign about new reforms and the rights and duties of citizens is underway to ensure development toward fair and transparent electoral processes designed to accomplish peacefully the task of nation-state building, amid ramifications of the ongoing complex geopolitical and strategic transitions throughout Central and Southwest Asia.

BACKGROUND: Uzbekistan's December 26 elections aim to institutionalize a major political development in the national democratic evolution. For the first time, the people of Uzbekistan will exercise their right to elect a bicameral House of Representatives with upper and lower houses of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament). Constitutional changes regarding the distribution of political power between the executive and legislative bodies and between the offices of President and Prime Minister are coupled with a nationwide public awareness campaign to educate the nation about the newly introduced structural reforms, the rights and duties of citizens as well as the role mass media plays in modernizing societies. The government of Uzbekistan appears earnest responding to international apprehensions about political transition by striving for broad-based public participation and improvements toward fair elections. Constant fears about activist extremisms spreading throughout the region and relevant security concerns however, make some international apprehensions appear somewhat contradictory. Citizens aged 18 and over, with 5 years inland residency are constitutionally eligible to vote through secret ballots (Parliamentary contest age is 25 years minimum) for both Oliy Majlis and Kengashes (Councils) of people's deputies at regional, district and city levels. Political parties and/or independent contestants without criminal record with substantial support by the voter initiating groups including party membership at the district level (8% of voters) are eligible to contest and register with the offices of the Ministry of Justice in the districts. Military and security apparatus personnel are ineligible. Political parties and independents are encouraged to reapply, if their applications did not meet the constitutionally defined registration standards in the first application. Registered political parties include (in alphabetical order) *Adolat*, *Fidokorlar*, *Mily Tiklanish*, *Liberal-Democratic Party* and the *People's Democratic Party*. The application by the *Birlik Party* was rejected. Reportedly *Birlik* was given three additional chances to reapply, albeit without success due to the minimally required number of party membership and the party's advocacy of dual citizenship, a subject that contradicts with clauses in the Constitution. A *Birlik*-associated politician based overseas privately confirmed the relatively small number of membership in *Birlik* and *Erk*, assuming that

some party members may be able to contest elections as independents. The Uzbek government is encouraging international observation groups to monitor the electoral processes.

IMPLEMENTATION: The Central Election Commission (CEC), established as an independent apolitical body under the Constitution and supported by autonomous institutions and regions, will supervise the election process in accordance with the existing legislation of July 22, 2002, already in place. Total membership of the lower house is 120, while the upper consists of a total of 100 seats with 6 senators from each region. The President will appoint 16 members among artisans, professionals and other less represented individuals/groups for societal balance. Candidates must win at least 33% of vote to be declared successful, barring which another election is held. Senate elections would be held within 3 months after those to the lower house. Parties and individuals are prohibited from receiving donations. The CEC receives funds for electoral expenses allocated by the national government to distribute among contestants, both parties and independents to organize campaigns. The CEC is responsible for ensuring that all contestants receive television campaigning time appropriately. The most important aspect is the three months long (September-November) nationwide political education campaign to inform the public about the nature of the new bicameral House of Representatives and its role in the prospects, problems and processes of democratic transformation. Many national and international scholars specializing in political reform have been invited to address the planned political education seminars. The idea of educational campaign is to dispel the previously held international concern about the lack of public information on political reform. The government of Uzbekistan appears enthusiastic about the planning and execution of Parliamentary elections and anticipates rewarding satisfaction.

CONCLUSIONS: The bicameral House of Representatives was envisaged by the Oliy Majlis, which amended the Constitution on July 22, 2002 to enshrine this new institutional development by year 2005. The forthcoming elections thus are a great opportunity for a substantial step forward in the democratic transition to help legitimize Uzbekistan's strategy of gradual political

development. Most importantly, it will provide the largest eligible voter population in Central Asia, approximately 14 million of Uzbekistan's nearly 25 million total population, the opportunity to cast vote (Approx. 11 million are under age 18). Leaders of nearly 95 percent literate Central Asia, irrespective of their Soviet past, are the founding fathers of their new nation-states. They seem to visualize formidable plans for the economic and political development, with great care taken to consider the unique realities of their own socio-political cultures. The majority of the regional states have so far effectively avoided the eruption of societal conflicts, which otherwise have marred much of the former USSR. A well-planned strategy of gradual political development could prove to be the answer to modernization in regions experiencing serious geopolitical stress. Meanwhile, faster strategies of political transformation have experienced serious backlash, not least in the nearby Caucasus. There is good

reason to argue that the pace of broad-based political reform in Central Asia could be increased, if the region was assisted to cope with the problem of its landlocked position, for example through alternate routes of economic and political communication. Amid pressures of a slowly stabilizing economy and waves of region-wide militant extremism, the processes of political reform in Uzbekistan appear genuine. If Uzbekistan is able to carry this process out as planned in spite of the geopolitical obstacles in its path, the successful accomplishment of national elections in Uzbekistan could prove to be a success case in the annals of comparative modern political transitions.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Prof. Aftab Kazi is a Senior Fellow of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute since 1998. He is writing a book on "The United States and Central Asia: Competition between Heartlands and Rimlands."

GERMANY, AZERBAIJAN'S POLITICAL ALLY IN EUROPE?

On August 25 and 26, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev made an official visit to Germany at the invitation of German president Horst Kohler. During the visit, the Azerbaijani delegation met with the federal president, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, MPs and business representatives.

Diplomatic relations between Germany and Azerbaijan were in February 1992, and a Germany Embassy in Baku soon opened. Unlike most European countries, Germany actively cooperates with Azerbaijan at the governmental level and the two countries have developed good relations. Through the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), Germany supports some enterprises and state structures in Azerbaijan. Germany actively participates in the development of the finance and banking sector in Azerbaijan, especially in the creation of credit structures of micro-financing of small and medium enterprises. GTZ actively promotes legal and judicial reform in Azerbaijan.

During bilateral talks, special attention was given to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to economic questions. In particular, Ilham Aliyev has declared the readiness of Azerbaijan to accept the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh as equal citizens of the country, but that Azerbaijan cannot allow the partition of the Azerbaijani state.

Concerning economic issues, Mr. Aliyev praised economic relations with Germany, and highly assessed bilateral relations. Chancellor Schröder, for his part, noted that "President Aliyev and I are convinced that the Karabakh conflict should be settled by political means. Germany, both earlier and today, recognizes and supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and as an active member of OSCE will use the best efforts for prompt peace and the fair settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of international principles and norms. It should be solved within the

framework of observance of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan", declared Schröder.

The German chancellor especially emphasized the interest of German business in the development of communications with Azerbaijan. He mentioned an economic forum of investment opportunities in Azerbaijan arranged this autumn in Berlin with the involvement of representatives of German and Azerbaijan business circles. The purpose of the forum is to study opportunities for German industrialists to invest in the Azerbaijani economy.

Until presently, Germany has provided aid to Azerbaijan in the amount of Euro 303.3 million. 140 million has been aid within the framework of the European Community, 130.33 million as bilateral financial cooperation and 33 million as bilateral technical cooperation. The project of restoration of water supply in Baku city and Ganja, the second-largest city in the country, deserves special mention. Together with Euro 10 million allocated by Switzerland, an additional 54 million euro have been pledged. According to local experts, it is the most important German-led project contributing to the development of Azerbaijan.

An Agreement on "avoidance of double taxation" was signed during the visit, as well as a contract with the Airbus international aircraft consortium on the delivery to Azerbaijan's state-owned airline AZAL of four Airbus A319 and one corporate jet. The first A319 will be already delivered to the country in mid-2005. The sum of the transaction, according to experts, is estimated in 136.8 million euro. This project will be financed by several German banks, credits will likely be given with government insurance arrangements.

During the visit, the large German company Siemens expressed readiness to invest in the construction of power stations with capacity of 500,000 Mw in Sumgayit, 30 km north of Baku. German businessmen have shown interest to invest

into other branches of the Azerbaijani economy, such as textile, medical industry and agriculture. Owners of the large German banks Kommerzbank and Berlinerbank have expressed a desire to start work in Azerbaijan.

Experts noted that the visit had an evident economic character. "The role of Germany and its capital in Azerbaijan is less than it could be, and is desirable and possible considering the potential of the two countries. So far, though much spoken about, large German capital that could play a significant role in the development of Azerbaijan, is not represented here well enough", economist Ingilab Ahmedov noted.

He emphasized that "Germans are participating in many small-scale projects, but do not show a desire to participate in large scale projects".

According to independent expert M. Aliyev, Germany is interested in escalating its position and investments in Azerbaijan. "German capital does not participate in oil and petrol service projects. But one can view Germany's participation as important precisely in the non-oil sector, which actually, is developing since several years. Germany is also interested in other fundamental things in Azerbaijan, such as institutional, systemic, and infrastructural reforms".

During 2004-2005, Germany will render to Azerbaijan financial aid in the amount of Euro 13.8 million and technical assistance worth five million Euros. This money is planned for legal and judicial reforms, improvement of the water supply system of Baku and Ganja, purchase by the German bank KfW of stocks in the Azerbaijan bank of micro-finance, the creation of a register of real estate, as well as expanding the activity of the Germany-Azerbaijan fund.

Gulnara Ismailova

NATO EXERCISES CANCELED IN AZERBAIJAN

Emin Alisayidov

In a move that is likely to complicate Azerbaijan's relations with NATO, Baku moved to block the participation of Armenian officers in the NATO Partnership for Peace exercise Co-operative Best Effort 2004, which was scheduled for this month. On September 13, the NATO Command cancelled the exercise and issued an official statement regretting that "the principle of inclusiveness could not be upheld." This was a culmination of the dispute between Azerbaijan and NATO over Armenia's participation.

BACKGROUND: Azerbaijani authorities found themselves between the pressure from NATO to allow military personnel of Armenia, which still occupies significant parts of Azerbaijan's territory, and the rapidly growing outrage in the Azerbaijani public. In fact, when last month a judge issued sentences ranging up to five years imprisonment for activists of the "Karabakh Liberation Organization" for breaking into the a hall where a NATO pre-exercise seminar was held with the participation of two Armenian officers, the verdict was roundly condemned by virtually all political groups in Azerbaijan. This was followed by a daily campaign conducted by independent and opposition media, printing first page ads and interrupting broadcasts to call for a ban on visits by Armenian officers.

Careful attempts by the authorities to balance the two pressures, most notably by trying to limit the number of the participants from Armenia and emphasizing the importance of cooperation with NATO did not prevent the mounting wave of public protests. The cancellation of the exercise marks a significant step in the Alliance's relationship with Azerbaijan, one of the most active and advanced members of the PfP program. Similarly, Baku's final decision to block the participation of Armenian officers was made with some pains. Pro-western oriented Azerbaijan, has over the years since PfP was established, stated its desire to integrate with NATO and has proactively participated in the Alliance's programs. Along with Georgia, Azerbaijan has been involved in Kosovo peace operation from the early days. In addition, Azerbaijani personnel serve in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, this latest incident comes against the background of Azerbaijan's deepening partnership with NATO and increasingly successful security cooperation with the United States.

Apparently, the noisy public protests in Azerbaijan, overshadowed the crux of Baku's position. It is not so much a rejection of visits by Armenians, but rather the presence of military officers who serve in the armed forces of Armenia which occupy Azerbaijan's territory, some of whom reportedly participated in the conflict in the early 1990s. When similar exercises were held in Armenia, the Azerbaijani military, following the same logic, chose not to participate while Armenia's Prime Minister Armen Darbinian took part in the TRACECA-Silk Road Summit in Baku in 1998; and other Armenian civilian figures have visited Baku on various occasions.

IMPLICATIONS: NATO's insistence on "inclusiveness" failed to recognize the overwhelming and emotional nature of protests in Azerbaijani society frustrated with the long-lasting unresolved conflict and years of non-productive peace talks. But moreover, NATO's criticism of Azerbaijan failed to recognize that Azerbaijan's stance directly upheld the very values enshrined in the framework document of Partnership for Peace. The Partnership Framework Document states that in joining the Partnership, states subscribing to the document "reaffirm their commitment to fulfil in good faith the obligations of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; specifically, to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, to respect existing borders and to settle disputes by peaceful means." In the context of Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories, "inclusiveness" could in fact be construed as amounting to an acceptance of the violation of these values.

Faced with the choice of either saying no to its favorite international alliance or inflaming the passions of virtually the entire population of the country, Azerbaijan's leadership went along with the popular demands. This should not be surprising to careful observers of the region, since the general line taken by the authorities over the last decade has been to follow policies acceptable to the public in general. The government in this instance chose not to pursue a policy unacceptable to the wider public.

In addition to possibility of certain tensions between Baku and NATO, the latest events may have other implications as well. The first and most obvious one is that the conflict with Armenia remains – and possibly strengthens – as a powerful mobilizing factor in the Azerbaijani society. It is difficult to imagine another issue, which would produce such unified, unequivocal views throughout the entire spectrum of society. Expressions of protest lead by the media and various NGOs were joined even by the generally reserved parliament with MPs appealing to NATO's Secretary General. Arguing that the participation of Armenian officers would have had a negative impact on the talks between presidents Ilham Aliyev and Robert Kocharian, Azerbaijan's foreign ministry hinted at the charged emotional atmosphere in the country following the protests. Contrary to the objectives of the "inclusiveness" approach, the attempts to

include Armenia's military officers in the exercise on the Azerbaijani soil may have produced the opposite effect of inflaming the population and further limiting president Aliyev's room for maneuver at the peace talks.

NATO's decision to cancel the exercise conformed to its policies, yet in Azerbaijan it is likely to be perceived as another indication of "double standards." For Azerbaijanis, who are mostly pro-American and pro-NATO, what they see as dismissive treatment by Western allies of its rather desperate concerns will only add to the existing disappointment. Although the incident does not help Azerbaijan's image within the Alliance, neither does it bode well for NATO's popularity among the population of one of its key partners. Moreover, disappointment in NATO, a popular alliance in Azerbaijan, is likely to increase general distrust to other international organizations as well. All of this is happening, of course, against the background of Moscow's active courting of Baku and Washington's preoccupation with the elections. As for Turkey,

once Washington's designee for regional leadership, Ankara seems fixated on its EU dimension and has not recently been actively engaged in the Caucasus.

CONCLUSIONS: Azerbaijani society emerged as more dynamic and less politically apathetic than it has appeared to outside observers. Vocal public protests and a strong NGO and media campaign energized even previously dormant political forces. Thus, if unlike other issues, the conflict with Armenia is a raw nerve in Azerbaijan, then touching it directly leads to an immediate public outcry among Azerbaijanis. And unlike NATO, the authorities in Azerbaijan cannot ignore the strong feelings of their people. For all the difficulties this may produce in Baku's relations with its international partners, the increasing sensitivity to domestic public opinion and adjusting policies to reflect the overwhelming views of the society may be a positive thing for the Republic of Azerbaijan.

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RUSSIA URGES KAZAKHSTAN TO FIGHT "INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM"

Moscow felt deeply humiliated by NATO's eastward expansion, American presence in Uzbekistan and Georgia's brazen pro-western stance. The hostage-taking in Beslan exposed Russia's incapability to manage the situation in Chechnya. All these setbacks drive Russia to a closer alliance with Central Asian states.

Kazakhstan's ability to react promptly to everything which happens in Russia surprises observers and irritates homegrown nationalists. Speaking at the joint session of Parliament immediately after two simultaneous plane crashes in Russia, President Nursultan Nazarbayev on September 1 called on the power-wielding bodies and security services to heighten security measures. The day, by irony, coincided with the hostage taking in the small Russian town of Beslan, apparently perpetrated by Chechen and other terrorists. Meetings of mourning for the victims in big enterprises, unanimous condemnations of hostage takers, and press accounts of these stage-managed acts of solidarity with Russia went off in the best traditions of Soviet propaganda campaigns.

Amid all these verbal wars against terrorists, the allegations of Russian prosecutor-general for the Southern Federal District Sergey Fridinski that among the hostage takers in Beslan were some Kazakhs produced a bombshell effect in the country. Under the pressure from media, the Kazakh Embassy in Moscow asked the Russian Foreign Ministry to confirm or reject this report. But the Russian officials remained silent for several days, during which speculations were circulating in the media in both countries. The National Security Service of Kazakhstan offered a weak denial of Russian allegations, putting up conflicting explanations for the Russian canard. First, Kazakh security offices stated that apparently there was a terrorist among hostage takers nick-named

"Kazakh", then they admitted the possible involvement of some Kazakhstan-born residents of Caucasus region in hostage taking.

It may be quite incidental that this diplomatic row set off on the eve of the Single Economic Space (SES) meeting and CIS summit in Astana on September 15-16. Although vital economic issues of tariff regulations, cross-border trade, and value added taxes stood high on the agenda of the SES meeting and 29 documents were approved for signing by July 1 next year, economic topics were overshadowed by security issues. Harping on the "international nature" of terrorism, President Putin of Russia called the leaders of Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus to strengthen control and deepen collaboration between security bodies within SES countries, which to his view, is a precondition for free movement of citizens within the SES space. Putin's intention to depict the Chechen war as a plot of international terrorists was echoed by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov who reiterated in Astana that the CIS countries were to act together to fight terrorism. The topic of combating separatism prevailed also in bilateral talks of CIS leaders.

Clearly, Russia's theory of international terrorism is not readily accepted by everyone. Even those nations who have suffer most from terrorist onslaughts treat the Kremlin's bellicose rhetoric with mistrust. One of the reasons for that seems to be the inconsistent policy of Moscow in its geopolitical pursuits in Central Asia. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov was quoted by Uzbek Television's first channel as saying before his departure to Astana that Russia should choose between the Single Economic Space and the CIS. Azerbaijan also turned its back on Russia. Moscow's recent threat to strike terrorists in any part of the globe put Kazakh nationalists on alert.

At the same time, parroting the Kremlin's militant phraseology, deputy chairman of the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan Vladimir Bozhko assured Parliament members that security forces were ready to handle terrorists in any CIS country. He also disclosed that since the hostage-taking drama in Moscow's Nord-Ost music hall in October 2002, Kazakh security services were intensifying intelligence activities in countries which pose a potential threat of terrorism.

At least for two reasons, Kazakhstan falls short of Russian expectations of regional security collaboration. First, as Bozhko admitted, Kazakhstan lacks funding to set up new anti-terrorist units. Second, for all drum-beating and saber-rattling, Kazakhstan lacks a clearly defined terrorist enemy. Speaking at Parliament, President Nazarbaev warned of religious extremism, mainly referring to growing activities of western religious sects and hinted that the 1992 law on "Freedom of Faith and Religious Associations" should be revised to limit the activities of foreign missionaries and sects. But these sects are not banned by the Constitution. Even Hizb-ut-Tahrir members who distribute leaflets calling for the creation of a caliphate and protest against American air bases in Uzbekistan have never threatened to overthrow the Kazakh government. This does not mean Hizb-ut-Tahrir radicalism is not a threat, although its activists have not resorted to armed violence so far. But the methods used by Russian security forces against Chechen separatists are not acceptable for Kazakhstan. Almaty Academy of Law Professor Guriy Khan believes that to uproot terrorism, the state should first eradicate poverty. These arguments will hardly be heeded by the Kremlin, which prefers military muscle to economic or any other methods.

Marat Yermukanov

NEWS BITES

GEORGIA TO EXPAND ITS DEPLOYMENT IN IRAQ

8 September

Georgian Defense Minister Giorgi Baramidze announced on 8 September that Georgia will significantly expand the deployment of Georgian peacekeepers in Iraq. In a statement to the media following his return from a fact-finding visit to Iraq, Baramidze added that the number of Georgian troops in Iraq will be increased from 159 to 300 in the next rotation, set for October. The planned increase is actually less than expected, as previous Defense Ministry plans called for an expansion of the Georgian contingent to 550 personnel. The Georgian contingent, deployed in Iraq since 2003, comprises troops from the 16th Mountain Battalion who graduated from the United States' Georgia Train and Equip program. Another 50 soldiers from the same U.S.-trained unit are also deployed in Afghanistan. (Civil Georgia)

CAMPAIGN-VIOLATION CHARGES FLY IN RUN-UP TO KAZAKH ELECTIONS

9 September

The moderate opposition party Ak Zhol has sent an appeal to President Nazarbaev charging that state-run television is favoring specific candidates in the run-up to the 19 September parliamentary elections, Kazakh television reported on 8 September. Meanwhile, the election bloc of Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan held a small unauthorized rally in Almaty on 8 September to protest violations of campaign-spending limits by the pro-presidential Asar party. Two bloc candidates and 40 supporters charged that Asar has spent \$700,000 more on political advertising than is allowed. Demonstrators handed a letter of protest to Khabar TV employees. Finally, the president's daughter, Darigha Nazarbaeva, who heads Asar and is director of Khabar news agency (a post she has left for the duration of elections), said that local administrations and business directors are pressuring people to vote for the pro-presidential Otan party. Nazarbaeva said that the "pressure, bullying, and blackmail" discredits the party's reputation. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH SECURITY HEAD DISMISSES 'KAZAKH TRACE' IN BESLAN EVENTS

9 September

Nurtai Dutbaev, who is chairman of Kazakhstan's National Security Committee (KNB), said on 9 September that the KNB has no information that any ethnic Kazakhs were involved in the bloody school siege in Beslan, in Russia's republic of North Ossetia. Noting that the KNB has been in contact with Russian security services from the outset,

Dutbaev stressed that "the situation has not yet been fully clarified." He said initial reports spoke of a Ukrainian-born ethnic Kazakh with Russian citizenship who went over to the side of Chechen militants after fighting in Chechnya for the Russian Army in 1994. Later reports indicated, however, that the alleged Beslan hostage taker was an ethnic Chechen who went by the nickname "The Kazakh." Dutbaev also said press reports of a group of terrorists headed for Russia through Kazakhstan were entirely false. "Our [Russian] colleagues have said that someone leaked false information to the press," Dutbaev added. (Kazakhstan Today)

IRANIAN PRESIDENT SIGNS SEVEN AGREEMENTS IN ARMENIA

9 September

President Khatami arrived in Yerevan on 8 September for a two-day Armenian visit. The two sides signed agreements on bilateral cooperation and on cooperation in the energy, culture, and customs fields. The energy agreements include one on construction of a gas pipeline from Megri to Kadzharan in southern Armenia and a second under which Iran will provide a \$30 million loan to finance construction. Khatami and Armenian President Robert Kocharian issued a joint statement emphasizing their shared belief that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue should be settled peacefully, and they also agreed on counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts. Khatami visited the Blue Mosque in Yerevan and addressed the Armenian legislature. Khatami is accompanied by Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, Energy Minister Habibullah Bitaraf, Economic Affairs and Finance Minister Safdar Husseini, and Commerce Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari. (Arminfo)

NOTED JOURNALIST BLASTS EUROPEANS WHO QUESTION RUSSIA'S CHECHEN POLICY

9 September

In a commentary published in "Rossiiskaya gazeta" on 8 September, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" founder Vitalii Tretyakov accused Europeans who have questioned Russia's Chechen policy of having "double standards." "The European human rights advocates have become so keen on protecting the rights of the killers that they think less and less about the rights of their victims," Tretyakov wrote. "If somebody in Europe is thinking that the Russian soldiers in Chechnya are defending the imperial ambitions of Russia or the popularity of its president, such thinking cannot be called anything other than intellectual idiocy." Whether their behavior is good or bad, "Russian soldiers in the Caucasus are defending the values of Christian civilization and the Euro-Atlantic world,

including the freedom and security of Europe," Tretyakov concluded. (RFE/RL)

AIRLINE EMPLOYEE, TICKET SCALPER ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH TWIN AIRPLANE EXPLOSIONS

9 September

Two men have been arrested in Moscow in connection with the investigation into the apparent terrorist bombing of two jet airliners on 24 August that killed 90 people, "Rossiiskaya gazeta" reported on 9 September. One of the men was identified as Krasnodar resident Armen Artyunov, who reportedly specializes in securing tickets for sold-out flights. Artyunov reportedly arranged for the purchase of the tickets of the two Chechen women who are believed to have been involved in the destruction of the aircraft and helped them to get aboard the planes. He reportedly received 5,000 rubles (\$167) for his help. The second man was identified only as an employee of Sibir Airlines, the company that operated one of the ill-fated flights. He is accused of accepting a 1,000 ruble bribe to secure a place on the flight for one of the women. According to the report, when one of the women was not able to get a seat on a sold-out Sibir flight to Volgograd, Artyunov accepted an additional 1,000 rubles to get her a ticket on the ill-fated Volgograd Aviaekspress flight to that city. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT AFFIRMS THAT ABKHAZIA REMAINS 'PRIORITY'

11 September

Meeting on 11 September in Tbilisi with members of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz parliament in exile, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili stressed that restoring Georgian hegemony over the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia remains a priority for him. Saakashvili stressed that the Georgian Army is being strengthened to deter foreign aggression, rather than in preparation for a military reconquest of Abkhazia. But at the same time, he said that "we must prevent illegal actions" in Abkhazia, including the 3 October presidential ballot. And he also warned that property in Abkhazia that has been illegally privatized will be confiscated. Numerous Russian businessmen have acquired property in Abkhazia in recent years. (Caucasus Press)

AZERBAIJANI PARLIAMENT APPEALS TO NATO

11 September
Azerbaijani lawmakers adopted an appeal on 10 September to NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer to rescind the invitation to Armenia to send a delegation to participate in military maneuvers to be held in Azerbaijan between 13-27 September under the aegis of NATO's Partnership for Peace program. On 11 September, the Azerbaijani daily "Ekspress" quoted unnamed Azerbaijani diplomatic sources as saying that as a result of talks in Brussels between NATO officials and Azerbaijani Foreign and Defense ministry representatives, it was agreed that three Armenians -- two officers and a military doctor -- will be permitted to attend

the maneuvers as observers, rather than participants. Also on 11 September, police in Baku dispersed a protest organized by the Karabakh Liberation Organization and other political organizations against the anticipated Armenian participation in the upcoming NATO exercises. (Groong)

IRANIAN PRESIDENT STRESSES ECONOMIC TIES ON TAJIK VISIT

12 September

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami said on 12 September in Dushanbe that it is Iran's "national duty" to strengthen ties with Tajikistan. Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov announced the same day that Iran has agreed to provide \$250 million for the construction of Tajikistan's Sangtuda hydropower plant. Overall, Rakhmonov said that Iran will cover 51 percent of the plant's more than \$500 million cost, with Russia providing \$100 million and Tajikistan \$120 million. Iran is also providing a \$25 million credit and a \$10 million grant to complete the 5-kilometer Anzob tunnel in Tajikistan by 2006. Iran plans to invest \$700 million in the development of the Tajik economy over the next five years. (Avesta)

US 'KILLS 22' IN AFGHAN FIREFIGHT

13 September

US forces have killed 22 suspected Taleban and al-Qaeda militants in a gun battle in southern Afghanistan, the US military says. American troops and helicopters fought the insurgents in the Shinkay district of Zabul province, late on Sunday. "Twenty-two anti-coalition militias were killed - three of them were Arabs," US military spokesman Major Scott Nelson said in Kabul. Zabul province is widely regarded as a Taleban stronghold. Major Nelson said three more suspected militants, including another Arab, had been captured in the latest fighting. He said about 40 militants armed with AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades had attacked American troops on patrol. "Our soldiers were out doing a cordon search when they were engaged by a large force of anti-coalition militias," Major Nelson said. The troops called in two Apache helicopter gunships which fired on the insurgents. "Skirmishes continued throughout the night," Major Nelson said. He said there were no US casualties. The US troops seized a global positioning system and a video camera and tapes. The US-led coalition has about 18,000 troops hunting Taleban and al-Qaeda militants in southern and eastern Afghanistan. The insurgents have vowed to disrupt the Afghan presidential elections on 9 October. Zabul is considered a huge security risk for aid workers and coalition forces. In May, four US soldiers were killed there by suspected Taleban militants, one of the biggest losses for American forces since they began operations in Afghanistan more than two years ago. Since the May attack, there have been a number of raids on Afghan government targets. (BBC)

ANTI-U.S., ANTI-BRITISH DEMONSTRATIONS HELD IN MOSCOW

13 September

Several hundred Russians demonstrated on 10 September in front of the U.S. and British embassies in Moscow, demanding extradition of two prominent Chechens granted asylum in the two countries, Western and Russian news agencies reported. The crowd, estimated at 1,500, criticized the United States for sheltering Ilyas Akhmadov, foreign minister in the administration of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, whom Russian officials hold responsible for terrorism. It criticized Britain for giving refugee status to Maskhadov representative Akhmed Zakaev. The demonstrators chanted and held banners accusing the United States and Britain of maintaining double standards on terrorism and thwarting Russian efforts to bring terrorists to justice. (RFE/RL)

HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN URGES MODERATION IN RESPONSE TO BESLAN CRISIS **13 September**

Human rights ombudsman Vladimir Lukin on 11 September criticized those who advocate "tightening the screws" on society in the wake of the recent terrorist incidents, RTR reported. "This is talk from people who are unable to deal with the difficult problems with which we live in a relatively more or less free society," Lukin said. Lukin compared the atmosphere in Russia today with what happened in the United States following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. "What happened there? Did they abolish democracy? Did they forbid citizens from the provinces from coming to Washington and New York? Nothing of the sort," Lukin said. "They set up an independent commission with representatives of many elements of civil society. The president accepted its recommendations with gratitude. And now we can see that in the course of three years there have not been major acts of terror [in the United States]." Lukin alleged that he had been illegally prevented by Moscow authorities from appearing on television during the Beslan hostage crisis. (RFE/RL)

MOSCOW WANTS VILNIUS TO CLOSE CHECHEN SEPARATIST WEBSITE IN LITHUANIA **13 September**

Moscow has demanded that the Lithuanian authorities take steps to close Chechen separatists' Kavkaz-Center website which operates in Lithuania. "Lithuanian Ambassador to Russia Rimantas Sidlauskas was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry on September 13, where he was told that Russia insistently demands that the activities of Chechen separatists' Kavkaz-Center website in Lithuania be stopped," says a Russian Foreign Ministry press release issued on Monday. "Any lack of action in the face of the website's continuing functioning on Lithuania's server will be viewed by Moscow as an overtly unfriendly step on the part of the Lithuanian authorities, which has a negative influence on the atmosphere of our bilateral relations," the release says. (Interfax)

EIGHTY-EIGHT CHECHENS ALLOWED TO ENTER POLAND **13 September**

Eighty-eight Russian refugees from Chechnya, who were earlier denied entry into Poland, managed to cross the Belarussian-Polish border on Monday, sources in the Brest passenger station's border control department (Belarus) told Interfax. All of them were given the status of refugees and sent to Polish centers for displaced persons, they said. Chief of the station's border control department, Sergei Dral, told Interfax that 125 refugees from Chechnya attempted to enter Poland on Saturday, but only 24 of them were cleared into that country. The other 101 Chechens had to return to Brest. On Sunday and Monday the refugees resumed their attempts to reach Poland, Dral said. (Interfax-West)

PUTIN ANNOUNCES BROAD REORGANIZATION OF POLITICAL SYSTEM IN RUSSIA **13 September**

Speaking at an expanded cabinet meeting including the heads of the 89 subjects of the Russian Federation and the heads of practically all federal institutions, President Vladimir Putin announced on 13 September radical changes in the organization of the political system in Russia. First, he proposed that the leaders of federation subjects, including Moscow and St. Petersburg, no longer be elected by direct ballot, but by the regional legislators endorsing candidates recommended by the president. Second, Putin suggested abolishing the single-mandate-district election system for the Duma, which constitutes half of the mandates in the lower chamber, and electing all deputies by the proportional, party-list system. The Central Election Commission has long been advocating this reform. Third, Putin proposed that before bills are submitted to the parliament, they must pass through a special new body to be called the public chamber. Putin also announced the creation of a special Federal Commission on the North Caucasus, headed by former presidential-administration head Dmitrii Kozak. Putin also appointed Kozak as his new envoy to the Southern Federal District, while the previous envoy, Vladimir Yakovlev, is to become minister of a reinstated Nationalities Ministry. Putin also announced a decision to ban extremist organizations, which are the "breeding ground for terrorism," and stressed Russia's determination to fight terrorism anywhere in the world. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA TIGHTENS CONTROL ON BORDER WITH AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA **15 September**

In order to preclude further terrorist acts in the North Caucasus, Russia has imposed restrictions on the passage of people and motor vehicles from Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Russian Federation, effective 15 September. All bus routes to Russia operated by Azerbaijani and Georgian companies have been suspended, as has all passenger-vehicle transport between Russia and Georgia. Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesman Metin Mirza declined to comment on the

restrictions. Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava said that he considers those restrictions, together with the suspension of flights by indebted Georgian air companies to Russia, to be politically motivated. (zerkalo.az)

ROCKET FIRED NEAR KARZAI MEETING

16 September

A rocket has landed near a school in south-eastern Afghanistan just before President Hamid Karzai was to land in a helicopter, officials say. The rocket struck about 1.5km (a mile) from the school in Gardez province as President Karzai was to land at a nearby airbase. Mr Karzai, the leading candidate in October's presidential election, was due to speak at the school. The president has cut short his visit and returned safely to Kabul. Reports said the rocket landed not very far from where the US military helicopters carrying President Karzai were preparing to land. It is not known who fired the rocket. No one was hurt, either on the ground or in the air, president spokesman Jawed Ludin told the Associated Press. American spokesman Major Mark McCann said the rocket landed just 300 metres from where the helicopter was supposed to land. "The president was not in any imminent danger," Mr McCann said. Correspondents say President Karzai has rarely been seen outside his heavily-fortified presidential compound since he survived an assassination attempt by suspected Taliban members in Kandahar in 2002. His critics say he has little control of events much beyond the capital, Kabul, where the country's ethnic warlords again hold sway. And since last summer, violence by militants opposed to the US-backed administration he runs has sharply risen - with many of their attacks targeting election workers and voters. (BBC)

CIS LEADERS ISSUE STATEMENT ON FIGHTING TERRORISM

16 September

The Council of the CIS chiefs of state has adopted a statement on fighting international terrorism, which expresses full solidarity with Russia in this cause. The chiefs of state said they are convinced that "only consolidating the efforts of all of civilized humankind in fighting international terrorism will make it possible to oppose the spread of this evil that has become one of the principal threats to international security and stability today." Although specific work is being done within the CIS to combine efforts in countering terrorism, "the latest events showed that this was not enough." (Interfax)

PUTIN FAVORS UNIFIED DEFINITION OF TERRORISM

16 September

Russian President Vladimir Putin has spoken against double standards in the definition of terrorism. "We believe that there should be not only the same definition of terrorism for everybody but we should also mean the same things when we talk about it," Putin said at a press conference in Astana in reply to a question from Interfax on Thursday. "Bin Laden

has twice offered a truce to Europe in exchange for withdrawal of troops from Iraq, but nobody has entered into negotiations with him, because the methods and means he chooses make it impossible to maintain dialogue with him," he said. (Interfax)

PUTIN SPEAKS ABOUT SETTTLING RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN DISAGREEMENTS

16 September

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he is convinced that all disagreements between Russia and Georgia should be resolved in a way that would meet the interests of all parties concerned. "An economic blockade, not to mention military pressure, do not result in resolving problems. This is not a road that leads to Church," Putin said at a press conference in Astana on Thursday, rephrasing a quote from a film by prominent Georgian moviemaker Tengiz Abuladze, which was extremely popular in the USSR in the late 1980s. Asked about transportation services between Russia and Sukhumi, the center of the Georgian breakaway province of Abkhazia, Putin said, "We believe there have never been any bans on commercial activities in this issue. We agreed with the previous Georgian president that transportation services with Sukhumi could be resumed after refugees return to the Gali district. As far as we know, 50,000-60,000 refugees have returned." (Interfax)

GORBACHEV FAVORS POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN CHECHNYA

17 September

Former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev said the latest terrorist attacks in Russia are directly linked to the ongoing conflict in Chechnya, which can be resolved exclusively by political means. "Politics, rather than force, is a major means for defeating terrorism. But unlike the president, I think that the terrorist attacks of the past few weeks are directly linked to the military actions in the Caucasus," Gorbachev said in his article published in the Moskovskiy Novosti newspaper on Friday. (Interfax)

CHECHEN SEPARATISTS USE U.S., BRITAIN AS IDEOLOGICAL BRIDGEHEAD - RUSSIA

17 September

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said that Chechen separatist emissaries Ilyas Akhmadov and Akhmed Zakayev are in fact using the information capabilities of the United States and Britain as a bridgehead for their propaganda. "Unfortunately these individuals are taking advantage of the news scene of the United States and Britain and are actually transforming those countries into a bridgehead for their ideological activities," Yakovenko told a Friday briefing in Moscow. He said Russia would continue efforts to extradite the two men who were involved in terrorist activities. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN TO EXPORT 1,000 TONNES OF URANIUM TO S.KOREA ANNUALLY

20 September

Kazakhstan will export 1,000 tonnes of uranium ore to South Korea per year, 8 under the terms of an inter-governmental agreement signed on Monday. The deal on cooperation on the peaceful uses of atomic energy was signed in Astana, following talks between Kazakh and South Korean presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and Roh Moo Hyun. Nazarbayev said at a news conference after the signing ceremony that South Korean nuclear power plants generate 40% of electricity in that country. Roh Moo Hyun said in turn that interest in Kazakhstan has increased in South Korea, "due to its rapid economic growth and political stability." (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

BAKU CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY OF THE "CONTRACT OF THE CENTURY"**20 September**

Baku is celebrating 10th anniversary of the "contract of the century" – first international oil contract of Azerbaijan with foreign companies on processing of Caspian deposits. The president of Azerbaijan, official representatives of Turkey, Georgia, the USA and other states, foreign companies participating in Azerbaijan's oil and gas projects attend the ceremony. The Prime minister Zurab Zhvania represents Georgian side. In the realization of Azeri-Chirak-Guneshli project valued at \$ 12 billion 9 leading oil companies from 5 states are participating. "Contract of Century" has already ensured inflow of \$ 7 billion in oil sector of Azerbaijan, additional incomes for 10 years of over 35 million tons of oil and 6 billion cubic meter of gas, construction of Baku-Novorosc and Baku-Supsa. Third, main export pipeline "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan" will be placed in exploitation next year. Through this Azerbaijan's exporting ability will exceed 60 million tons of oil per year. 9 million tons carbohydrates are planned to deliver on international markets by means of the mentioned functioning pipelines in 2004. In 10 years period, Azerbaijan signed 23 oil contracts with leading foreign companies with total value of over \$60 billion. Contract on processing deposit of Azeri-Chirag-Gjuneshli" was concluded on September 20, 1994. Participants of the project are BP - 34.1367%, American Unocal -10.2814%, ExxonMobil - 8.0006%, Devon Energy -5.6262%, Amerada Hess -1.0413%, SOCAR - 10%, INDEX -10%, Itochu - 3.9205%, Norwegian Statoil -8.5633%, Turkish TPAO -6.75% and Saudi Arabian Delta Oil -1.68%. (Black Sea Press)

GEORGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER CRITICIZED OVER UNPAID UN DUES**20 September**

Georgian parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze on 20 September asked Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili to explain to the parliament's committee on foreign relations why Georgia is at risk of losing its voting rights at the UN because of unpaid membership dues amounting to almost \$6 million, Caucasus Press reported. Burdjanadze argued that the Foreign Ministry should have acted earlier to avert that possibility. The arrears date back at least five years, and Tbilisi

has avoided forfeiting its voting rights only by paying off portions of that debt at intervals. Speaking in New York on 20 September, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili described the work of Zourabichvili, whom he personally appointed foreign minister in March, as "not ideal," but he acknowledged that she has contributed a great deal to Georgia's relations with Europe. (ITAR-TASS reported)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION LEADER GIVES EVIDENCE AT SUPPORTERS' TRIAL**21 September**

Opposition Musavat party Chairman Isa Qambar testified on 20 September at the trial of seven opposition activists accused of organizing mass protests in the wake of the 15 October presidential ballot. Qambar told the court he remains convinced that he, not Ilham Aliyev, was the rightful winner of the presidential ballot. He said he personally called on his supporters to convene in Baku on 16 October to protest the authorities' rigging of the election outcome. That meeting degenerated into violence between police and Qambar supporters. (zerkalo.az)

CHECHEN LEADER HAILS CONVICT'S RECALL OF PARDON APPEAL**21 September**

Chechen President-elect Alu Alkhanov on Tuesday hailed news that a Russian army officer convicted in 2003 of abducting and murdering a teenage Chechen girl in 2000 had recalled an appeal for a pardon. Col. Yury Budanov withdrew his appeal after a September 15 decision by the clemency commission of the region where he is serving his 10-year sentence set off a storm of protests in Chechnya. Budanov, who commanded a tank regiment, accused his victim, 17-year-old Elza Kungayeva, of being a rebel sniper. He seized the girl from her home in her village of Tangi in Chechnya and took her to his base, where he questioned and strangled her, after which he ordered his soldiers to bury her. (Interfax)

PRO-GOVT PARTY LIKELY TO HAVE MOST SEATS IN KAZAKH PARLIAMENT**21 September**

Representatives of Kazakhstan's pro-government Otan (Fatherland) party will have no less than 60% of the seats in Majilis, the lower house of parliament, said a party official. "In total, we hope to win no less than 60% of the seats in the parliamentary elections by party lists and in single-mandate districts," Otan's vice chairman Amangeldy Yermegiyayev told a news conference in Astana. Otan was established in 1999, and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev is its ideological leader. Kazakhstan's parliamentary elections were held on September 19. Yermegiyayev said that Otan won in 30 of the 40 electoral districts where party representatives ran (75%). Two candidates were disqualified by election commissions and seven others quit the race. Otan candidates will continue the race in 18 of the 22 electoral districts where run-off elections will be held. Otan candidates were the only winners in four of these 18 electoral districts, he said.

"Judging by all accounts, Otan will represent a majority in the future parliament and is likely to have more than 50% of the seats," Yermegiyayev said. The Kazakh Central Elections Commission has yet to announce preliminary returns in the parliamentary elections. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

U.S. AMBASSADOR SUGGESTS WAYS TO CONFRONT TERROR IN EURASIA

21 September

The U.S. has proposed that the mechanisms of the OSCE and the NATO-Russia Council should be employed to fight terrorism in Eurasia by developing new methods for coordinating efforts to maintain security and stability in that region, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow said at the EurAsEC Business World international congress on Tuesday. The United States believes that Russia has strong

interests in Central Asia and the U.S. government shares these interests, he said. Both Russia and the U.S. are interested in having democratic states in that region, so that it does not turn into a breeding ground for terrorism and extremism, he said. Stability in Central Asia is of special importance, because the region borders countries that have suffered from terrorism most of all, Vershbow said. The ambassador recalled his repeated statements that the U.S. is interested in a stable and prosperous Russia. He said that Russia also needs stable and prospering neighbors, including the countries comprising the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). EurAsEC is composed of Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova have observer status in the organization. (Interfax)

