

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING
VOL. 6 NO. 24
14 DECEMBER 2005

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Submission Guidelines:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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KAZAKHSTAN'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: A STEP FORWARD

Robert Barry

Much of the Western commentary concerning the December 4 Presidential elections concerned the flaws observed by the OSCE election observation mission. As an observer with considerable experience in elections in the former Soviet Union and the Balkans, this author found the signs of progress more noteworthy. The most positive change were the role of the Central Electoral Commission and the publication of precinct polling results. These improvements are important for Kazakhstan to realize its ambition of chairing the OSCE in 2009. However, for that to happen, further reforms and sharing of power are likely to be necessary.

BACKGROUND: When this author served as head of the OSCE election observation mission during Kazakhstan's parliamentary elections in 2004, the problem considered to be the most serious was the lack of transparency in the work of the Central Election Commission. This year, under new leadership, the Commission corrected this flaw. Moreover, the publication of election results broken down by polling station represented another major step forward towards transparency, since observers are now able to verify that the counts in polling station protocols were carried over into the vote totals reported by the CEC. In 2004, the OSCE was told that this practice would be inaugurated. This year, the promise was kept.

There were other noteworthy accomplishments as well. It was decided well in advance that voters would be offered a choice of paper or electronic voting in polling stations where both were available. Voter lists were improved over 2004, and the practice of maintaining two voters lists for paper and electronic voting was ended. Voters were no longer pressured to use the Silau electronic system, as was the case last year. Improvements made the Silau system easier to use.

There remains widespread public distrust of the Silau system, as evidenced by the fact that where there was a choice, anywhere from 66% to 90% of voters chose to use paper ballots. But given the fact that paper protocols are often the source of intentional or unintentional distortion of the vote, electronic voting is likely to be the wave of the future in Kazakhstan. Public trust could be enhanced by requiring international certification of the Silau system, and by modifying it to provide for a manually auditable paper trail, similar to that being gradually introduced in the Russian Federation.

On election day, OSCE observers considered the vote count to be poorly executed in 27% of polling stations. In contrast in Azerbaijan, where I also observed the presidential elections in November, the percentage of vote counts considered "bad" or "very bad" was 43%. Positive developments in Kazakhstan this year included the following: improved handling of complaints and appeals; inclusive registration of candidates and provision of a real choice to voters; free airtime provided to candidates in accordance with the law; fewer occasions of official interference with media coverage than in the past; observers were provided access to election commissions at all levels

and protocols of results were provided as required by law. On election day, OSCE observers assessed the vote positively in 90% of polling stations visited. The voter turnout of 75% reflected genuine interest on the part of voters as well as pressures to “get out the vote”.

IMPLICATIONS: Despite these positive developments, one must agree with the preliminary conclusions of the OSCE election observation mission that this election did not fully meet international standards – a conclusion that was also drawn, for example, concerning the most recent elections in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. Serious problems stemmed from the mistaken idea that an active opposition represents an unacceptable threat to “stability”, a concept fostered by statements from the security organs claiming that opposition supporters planned violent actions. The result was that actions were taken at the local level to limit access by opposition candidates to voters, and to harass opposition supporters. As has been the case in the past, local executives and employers have put pressure on voters to support the ruling party and its candidate.

It is traditionally the case in post-Soviet societies for local officials to demonstrate their worth by “over-fulfilling the plan” when election time comes, and no amount of rhetoric from the top leadership will persuade them that this conduct will not be rewarded in the long run. This was clearly the case in Azerbaijan as well, even after President Aliyev threatened to remove local executives who interfered

with the election process – something he also did in several cases after the elections.

Further impetus for “squeezing” the opposition resulted from a misunderstanding of the “color revolutions” that swept Georgia, Ukraine and allegedly Kyrgyzstan as well in past months. In fact the cause of these upsets of long-serving rulers was the attempted suppression of the opposition linked with heavy-handed corruption. True stability can only come to pass when ruling parties accept not only the legitimacy, but also the necessity of a strong opposition as a precondition for democratic rule.

CONCLUSIONS: The presidential election is not an end point in the evolution of democracy in Kazakhstan. President Nazarbayev has a mandate to proceed with further democratic reforms, which were also endorsed by the leading opposition candidates. The increasing of the powers of the Majilis and the further expansion of the electoral principle to local government would help to demonstrate Kazakhstan’s credentials when a decision is made in December 2006 concerning Kazakhstan’s bid to chair the OSCE in 2009.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Robert L. Barry is a retired U.S. Ambassador, who administered national and local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina as OSCE Head of Mission 1998-2001. Since then, he has headed or participated in OSCE election missions to Serbia, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. He has also observed elections in Indonesia, where he was U.S. Ambassador, for the Carter Center.



Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
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ELECTIONS IN CHECHNYA: HAVE THEY RETURNED LIFE TO NORMAL?

Murad Batal Al-Shishani

The result of the parliamentary elections in Chechnya on September 27, 2005, that were run by the Russian government through the pro-Russian local administration, did not come as a surprise to observers of the Chechen scene. The "United Russia" party won a majority of votes exceeding 68%. Eurasians and Liberals did not receive more than 10% while the surprise was Communists, who received 12% of the votes. Observers that do not follow the dynamics of the Chechen conflict might think that the situation is on a path of normalization after more than ten years of war. This is the picture the Russian government wishes to reflect, but reality is different.

BACKGROUND: These elections constitute the last phase in a three-phase "political process" designed by the Kremlin to normalize conditions in Chechnya through its loyalist Chechen government. The first phase consisted of holding a constitutional referendum in March 2003, followed by presidential elections held in November 2004 that resulted, as was clear, with the success of the pro-Russian administration, headed by former *mufti* Ahmad Kadyrov, who was killed only seven months later. The elections were pursued nevertheless and placed Alu Alkhanov at the head of the government. The third phase was that of parliamentary elections with participation of political parties.

This "political process" adopted by Moscow in Chechnya met with great opposition from human rights and humanitarian organizations, analysts, journalists and regional organizations – in spite of the participation of some regional organizations that entertain good relations with Moscow as monitors of the electoral process. The bodies that had reservations over the "political process" justified their boycott of the elections with the presence of military forces among civilians: the news agency Interfax indicated on September 27

that 16,000 Russian soldiers were to participate in the elections. Other reasons cited included the lack of honesty and transparency, and the fact that voting took place in dreadful humanitarian conditions for the Chechen people. This was most authoritatively indicated by a report published by a group of humanitarian organizations explaining the conditions surrounding the "political process", entitled "In a Climate of Fear".

Generally speaking and in addition to the reservations of those humanitarian organizations, the party that won the elections, United Russia, is led by the son of the former pro-Russian president, Ramzan Kadyrov, who is in fact ruling over Chechnya with his militias that exceed 5,000 fighters. He is also involved in human rights violations and cases of corruption, all in collaboration with the Russian forces. That is why many consider that these elections are only paving the way for Kadyrov Jr. to assume authority, which will in turn will diminish that of the present pro-Russian president Alu Alkhanov.

IMPLICATIONS: While the "new" Chechen constitution, that was written in Moscow, stipulates that the president to be over thirty

years old, Kadyrov Jr. will be ready for this position on October 5. As a result, observers believe that those last elections came to prepare him to head the pro-Moscow administration in Chechnya. Reports indicate that Kadyrov Jr. is trying also to legitimize his control over the oil industry and assets and the Republic's economic institutions through the new parliament.

Kadyrov Jr.'s ambition is set to create a rivalry and conflict of interests between him and Alu Alkhanov, who on the morning of the elections announced that he was on his way to Brussels to negotiate with Chechen fighters, in spite of having always been opposed to holding any dialogue with them. During his visit to Jordan, which was part of a tour that included Syria as well, Alkhanov had previously alluded to criticisms of Kadyrov Jr. in an attempt to gain the support of Chechens living abroad, especially in Jordan. This is a telltale sign of a possible collision between pro-Russian parties, particularly as some reports indicate tension between Kadyrov Jr. and pro-Russian field commander Sulim Yamadayev. A possible outcome is a conflict over economic and political power, that could turn out to be bloody, between all those parties.

Two elements in the political equation in Chechnya have not yet been analyzed, and are more important than the pro-Russian administration: the Chechen resistance and the Chechen people. Speaking on behalf of the Chechen resistance, the President of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Abdul-Halim Sadulayev announced that the elections were a "charade" and that the Chechen people were frustrated with the political process run by Moscow. Results from opinion polls held before the elections indicated that 68 percent thought that the elections would not be honestly held and only 8 percent said they would be. In addition, 72 percent thought that Kadyrov was the one

benefiting from the elections and that they were held to serve his interest.

CONCLUSIONS: If we add to these frustrations the taxes imposed on people by way of supporting the political process or building a statue for Kadyrov Sr., and the poor humanitarian conditions resulting from the violations committed by Russian forces and their local subordinates, the prospects look bleak: one the one hand, we can expect on the one hand that increasing numbers of common Chechens will join the resistance, and on the other that the extremism and radicalization of the resistance will increase. Indeed, Sadulayev has moved closer to the hard-line Chechen resistance that seeks to alleviate the pressure it faces inside Chechnya with operations in neighboring territories. This helps explain the statement by pro-Russian Chechen Interior Minister the week after the elections to the effect that the situation in Chechnya has escalated after the elections and "offenses have sharply increased".

There are three clear indicators of the failure of the Russian policy, military and political, in Chechnya: the pro-Russian parties, the armed resistance and the Chechen people. The Russian policy is generating a possible escalation of violence and extremism between those three parties in a way that indicates that after a decade from of war, the human tragedy in Chechnya is far from over.

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COULD KAZAKHSTAN MOVE BEYOND ELECTORAL AUTHORITARIANISM?

Fredrik M. Sjöberg

Seven more years with Nursultan Nazarbayev: this was the outcome of Kazakhstan's December 4 presidential election. The question is whether Kazakhstan will choose an evolutionary approach to democratization, or if it will halt it or even descend deeper into authoritarianism. Despite flaws, the last elections gave reason for hope. The opposition strategy is to challenge the election irregularities through the judicial system and not through the streets, which could be seen either as a sign of weakness or as maturity. How these court cases are handled will be a crucial test for the emergence of a rule-based government in Kazakhstan. At stake here is not merely political participation but long-term stability, something that will be closely followed by global powers.

BACKGROUND: These elections were of great interest to the entire region, but particularly relevant to the OSCE countries due to Kazakhstan's ambition to take over the OSCE presidency in 2009, an issue that will be decided in 2006. None of the previous elections, that is the 1999 presidential election or last year's parliamentary election, were deemed to have fully complied with Kazakhstan's international commitments to free and fair elections.

The electoral campaign was fairly low-key with no major issues dominating the agenda. There was a televised TV-debate, in which the incumbent Nursultan Nazarbayev did not take part, since he was on a trip to Ukraine. The alleged suicide of Almaty oblast head Zamanbek Nurkadilov was perhaps the most dramatic event during the period, but in spite of allegations relating the event to his position as a prominent opposition figure, it never really played out in the campaign. Nazarbayev himself did not officially campaign, but his campaign volunteers were out campaigning for him in bright yellow jackets.

Several divisive strains exist in Kazakhstan's society. These include territorial (centre vs. periphery, rural vs. urban), ethnic (Kazakh vs. Russian), and socioeconomic (wealthy vs. poor). The focus of attention during this presidential campaign was on economic distribution and stability. Nazarbayev had a clear platform that included substantial increases in pensions and other benefits, and the platform was released the week before the elections. This made it hard for the

opposition to react to it. The main theme of the leading opposition candidate, Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, a former Nazarbayev ally, was social justice. Ordinary citizens regularly complain about the increasing gaps between the haves and the have-nots. Large-scale social unrest is nevertheless unlikely at the moment, since improvements have been promised and people generally feel disillusioned with the available alternatives. Nazarbayev is clearly popular, receiving approval rates of ca. 70-80 percent in opinion polls over the past few years.

A crucial remaining democratic problem is the freedom of the press. This problem became obvious during the campaign, as opposition newspapers were confiscated at several occasions. The post-election period also saw similar cases, for example when Kazakh authorities a week after the elections seized the entire print run of the post-election issue of the opposition newspaper "Juma Times".

According to most observers, election day itself went relatively well, apart from a few cases of serious irregularities in counting and tabulation. Taking into consideration that one of the key problems in post-Soviet countries is the actual implementation of laws and regulations, seeing that parts of the election administration had really improved inspired hope. When democratic principles trickle down to the polling station level, they might be hard to turn around, even if authorities would so desire. The main problem with this campaign was not Election Day but the pre-election period, with remaining problems for

opposition candidates to get coverage in media and restrictions on the freedom of assembly.

Nazarbayev won a landslide victory with 91 percent of the vote, according to preliminary results. Tuyakbai, the main opposition candidate out of four, got a meager 6,6 percent of the vote. Turnout was as high as 75 percent according to the preliminary results, and observers did witness long lines at polling stations.

IMPLICATIONS: The main short-term implication of the election is the further consolidation of Nazarbayev's power. Public unrest is at this point not a threat to the ruling elite, and the opposition has specifically chosen not to seek to generate unrest. What the ruling elite is vulnerable to, however, is charges of mismanagement of public office, especially cases involving high-level corruption such as the Giffin case, a corruption case involving an American oil consultant accused of bribing Kazak officials. Such corruption cases can have a detrimental effect on the popularity of the newly re-elected president.

The further consolidation of Nazarbayev's power poses a challenge to future improvements of the rule of law and democratic governance in the country. The key question for the next several months is whether the President will choose to devolve some political power to the parliament, as in Ukraine, or whether the Russian model of further centralization is applied. Interestingly, Nazarbayev and his two main contenders all support the idea of having regional governors elected instead of appointed. For Nazarbayev, it will be a real challenge to move beyond patronage and co-optation of political opponents as a method of ruling.

There are broadly speaking two alternatives for Kazakhstan. One is to promote loyalty to an inclusive and democratic state, which is the path of civic democracy. The other is to go along a more nationalistic and exclusive line, which might in its worst form lead to ethnocracy. The latter would further estrange the large Russian minority in Kazakhstan. If a more inclusive form of governance was introduced it would give the people a higher stake in the state and therefore create loyalty to the state. This may sound abstract and lofty, but in Kazakhstan these issues have a tangible relevance.

Even though Kazakhstan has enjoyed rapid economic growth and substantial poverty reduction

for the last years, social tensions might nevertheless emerge as a threat to the political stability of the country. If the government chooses to speed up public sector reform and indiscriminately deliver along the lines of its promises, it would effectively disarm the opposition. The opposition might still regroup and formulate new critiques, but absent social discontent, it would have a hard time succeeding.

CONCLUSIONS: The presidential election in Kazakhstan offered both encouraging and discouraging signals. The positive developments of the election day set the standard for future elections in Kazakhstan, something that Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga, considered to be the next in line for the post, must be aware of. The country unquestionably faces huge challenges in its lengthy and cumbersome transition to more democratic forms of government. In the short term stability prevails, but the underlying societal tensions stand the risk of acquiring a more revolutionary character if the re-elected president proves unable to deliver according to his election promises. The president is clearly popular, but nevertheless not immune to charges of misuse of public office. Combating corruption and ensuring more transparency in the work of the government is a challenge to the current leadership, given the widespread nature of patronage.

A discouraging element of the last election was the restrictions on the right of assembly and the harassment of opposition media. In the near future, Nazarbayev has a golden opportunity to take the allegations of election irregularities seriously and to make sure that the judicial system solves the disputes in an impartial and timely manner. This is a test of his sincerity in moving beyond electoral authoritarianism. This is a process that will be closely followed by the international community.

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WINTER FOR THE KYRGYZ REVOLUTION

Zoya Pylenko

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev has been in power for more than 100 days. It now seems that winter has come for Kyrgyzstan's March revolution in more than just a natural sense. Some of Bakiev's one-time revolutionary allies, like Azimbek Beknazarov and Roza Otunbaeva, have been estranged from him and are firmly back in opposition. Bakiev's relation with his prime-minister, Felix Kulov, also appears to remain difficult. The President seems unlikely to give the prime-minister all the powers they agreed to earlier. The unstable political situation is still hindering economic development, making the country less and less attractive for investors.

BACKGROUND: Kyrgyzstan's new, post-revolutionary government has turned out to be less strong or united than people had hoped. After Bakiev's inauguration in mid-August, cracks have appeared. Some icons of the March revolution – very popular with the people – lost, or were dismissed from, their posts. Most important of all, prosecutor-general Beknazarov was fired by Bakiev in September, and later that month, acting foreign minister Otunbaeva failed to get parliamentary confirmation for her post when candidates were considered for the new cabinet. In parliamentary by-elections in late November in the southern Aksy district and in Bishkek, Beknazarov managed to win a seat while Otunbaeva failed to win hers. This second defeat might well mean the political end for her.

This only leaves Felix Kulov, the prime-minister, of strong, independent-minded politicians in the cabinet. He is very popular – especially in the northern part of the country – partly because of his incarceration under the previous President, Askar Akaev. Hence even if he wanted to, Bakiev might find it too dangerous to get rid of Kulov as well. But thus far, in his function as prime minister, Kulov hasn't received as much power as was promised earlier. Kulov did not participate in the July presidential election, instead supporting Bakiev on the condition of gradually changing Kyrgyzstan's presidential system into a parliamentary one. The prime minister's post would be given to Kulov under the deal and would receive the right to appoint ministers and heads of local government, leaving the security forces under presidential control.

But a transfer of power from the President to the prime minister is unlikely to happen soon. The Constitutional Council, headed by Bakiev, has not yet adopted the necessary changes to the constitution. And when appointing new ministers to the cabinet in September, Bakiev and Kulov *both* tried to get their allies in. For example, in early September, Kulov's ally Almazbek Atambaev was appointed minister of economic development, trade and industry. But at the end of September, Atambaev had lost the economic portfolio to Akyzbek Japarov, who is closer to Bakiev and who became minister of economy and finance. Atambaev remained in charge of the less powerful ministry of industry, trade and tourism.

While the authorities are still struggling to find a power-sharing compromise, insufficient attention is paid to economic plans made before the election. During Askar Akaev's regime, corruption and nepotism were major problems. During his inauguration, Bakiev said his main goal was to combat corruption and, as a result, to fill the state budget with more money. But a sincere fight against corruption (which is considered to be the country's most negative characteristic by investors) has not been effectively started yet. Beknazarov, when prosecutor-general, was responsible for combating corruption. He reportedly believes that a reason for his dismissal was that certain people feared he was becoming too effective in that job. Indeed, his successors do seem less zealous.

Kulov, as Bakiev, has promising plans to improve the business environment. They include simplifying regulations for businessmen, reducing the rates of taxes and change the tax system, and improving the

court system. So far, however, these are mostly still just plans. And as long as the political situation remains unstable, it will be difficult to implement them.

IMPLICATIONS: The unity of the revolution has been shattered, and the choir of voices suggesting that Bakiev prefers to have allies and subordinates rather than potential rivals around him is growing. By now, in effect, a new opposition has been formed by Beknazarov and Otunbaeva. The latter however failed to gain a parliamentary seat in November's by-elections and it remains to be seen how effective she can be in future. But Beknazarov is in the parliament and could prove a magnet for unsatisfied people to rally around.

Kyrgyzstan's political problems are added to its economic problems to make the country less attractive for investors. But investments are direly needed to increase the country's low level of life. Heavy-handed attempts at re-privatization, unlawful seizures of land, conflicts over property ownership, and even several assassinations linked to business interests did their bit to frighten both local and international businessmen. There are some fears that corruption has progressed so much that criminal figures are powerful enough to dictate their terms to the authorities. Recent unrest in prisons in October, which may have killed 20 inmates, shed some light on the affluence and influence that criminal leaders even *in* prisons still seem to enjoy.

Economic disputes have also had negative consequences. The seizure of the Kara-Keche coal mines, the country's most important ones located in the center of Kyrgyzstan in June 2005 by local groups resulted in a sharp decline of coal production. As a result, coal prices have increased, especially now that snow has fallen. And this dispute still remains unsolved.

Gold production has also dropped because of problems at the country's main, Canadian-owned Kumtor gold mine which is the main source of the state's annual income. Here, locals several times blocked the road to mine, demanding compensation for a 1998 cyanide spill near the site. Compensation had been paid earlier but, critics say, corrupt officials made sure little of the money reached the people affected. Overall, industrial output fell by 8.3 percent year-on-year in January-August 2005.

Instability in Kyrgyzstan was reflected in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index, published in late September. It put Kyrgyzstan on place 116 of 117. The most problematic factors indicated for doing business in Kyrgyzstan were corruption, its tax regulations and tax rates, bad access to financing, a non-effective government bureaucracy, and unstable politics.

According to a survey for the fourth quarter by Kyrgyzstan's International Business Council (IBC) "investors think that the investment climate is actually worse today than immediately after the revolution in March". The IBC further says that now is the first time that investors have been negative about the future in Kyrgyzstan since its survey began, in December 2000. In June, investors had still been confident there would be "significant improvement" by December 2005.

CONCLUSIONS: The best way to lure investment into Kyrgyzstan is to assure investors there will be no future upheavals. Just maintaining stability could help a lot. According to the IBC, stability in Kyrgyzstan would help the country multiply its wealth thanks to its favorable location between two economic powerful and rapidly developing countries, Kazakhstan and China. In such an environment, writes the IBC, "The Kyrgyz government only has to maintain civil order and keep borders open, in order to have 5 percent annual growth." Of course, with neighbors reaching 9 percent annual growth rates, a 5 percent growth rate is not necessarily a sign of success.

So far, experience does not suggest that the government is very good yet at maintaining order and preventing unrest. Tensions between Bakiev and Kulov might still come to the open, which could cause serious conflict. On November 28, Bakiev told the Russian news agency Interfax that combining the posts of President and prime-minister (in effect: abolishing the post of prime-minister) would most likely have a positive effect. He added, though, that the current political situation called in fact for keeping the prime minister as a guarantee for stability. Perhaps this assessment is open for change?

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FIELD REPORTS

NEW PASSPORTS: ANOTHER CHALLENGE FOR TRAVELING TAJIKS

Bakhtiyor Naimov

In July 2004, a document was signed by the members of the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan), about the requirement of international (foreign) passport to travel or even in order to enter each other's territories. This policy was initially to be enforced from January 1, 2005; however, due to the shortage of passports in Kyrgyzstan and the technical difficulties for the ca. 600,000 Tajik citizens residing abroad, the requirement was deferred to 2007 for the citizens of these countries.

The issue of passport change is not something new to Tajikistan. Since independence, the Tajik government required changes to internal passports three times already: first to change the Soviet passports to new internal passports that were only in Tajik language; the second time, to change the passports in Tajik into documents with details also in the Russian language and with black and white photographs; and just before the law about the mandatory foreign passports for travel abroad, the new *Somoni* internal passports were introduced, which were exactly the same as the previous passports, except for having a serial number written on all pages. In addition to that, Tajiks must now change their internal passports at the ages of 25 and 40. Since the change of an old passport to a new one is not free, it is alleged that this is a way of to line the coffers of the government budget.

The new international passports have two more complicated issues connected with them. The first is the price of US\$35 if one applies through the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), US\$100 if one applies through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

(MFA) and US\$65 if one applies through Tajikistan's embassies in the countries of the EEC. The second, more complicated issue concerns only the male population and it is the prerequisite of serving two years in the army for getting the foreign passport.

Despite the prerequisites for these new passports, those that have all their documents ready still face many obstacles. The biggest problem is the poor facilities in the MIA, MFA, and OVIR (visa and registration department), including insufficient computers, scheduled electricity, poor communications, etc. As a matter of fact, about 350 legally issued international passports turned out to be forged with watermarks missing on some pages. Since most Tajiks that apply for foreign passports are migrant workers in Russia, those unfortunate enough to get passports without watermarks were forced by Russian customs officials to fly back to Dushanbe. This meant that they did not only lose their airfare, but also had to wait another month for their passports to be changed, with additional payments. There were cases in Bishkek when Tajik students studying at various universities in Kyrgyzstan applied for passports through the Embassy of Tajikistan and after two months of waiting received their passports with the photo attached crookedly and outside the permitted square. In addition, the brightness of the print depends on how well one is related to the issuing agents, because in most of the passports the details are gray and hard to read. These small details might seem of little consequence to officials in Tajikistan, but they make a big difference when one passes through malevolent custom officials at home and abroad.

On the subject of customs, it is worth highlighting that Tajikis do not only have problems at home; in fact, most of the problems concerning the change of passports began at the border crossing points of the five concerned countries before January 1, 2005, when the policy was officially to be enforced. For example, Kazakh customs officials at the border between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan demanded that two Tajik students traveling from Bishkek to Almaty to take a TOEFL exam in December 2004 produce foreign passports. One of the students noted that: "Had we not insisted our rights and proved that the international passports are to be mandatory only from the beginning of 2005, we would have been either turned back or forced to pay a bribe. Tajiks traveling abroad are usually not only

the victims of customs but also disadvantaged in most situations. In airports, they are afraid to miss their flight if they follow the customs official to the custom house for disputing a problem; and when traveling by road, they are afraid that their bus or taxi will not wait; therefore, they choose to pay.

It is clear that the Tajik government has failed to bring about a suitable process for applying and receiving passports, to ensure that all passports are being printed and issued properly, to have affordable pricing, and to make passports available to the people with reasonable waiting times. Certainly, customs officials will have always find faults, especially for citizens of Tajikistan, but the government should not make life more difficult for its citizens than it already is.

SALOME ZOURABICHVILI: GEORGIA'S OPPOSITION LEADER?

Kakha Jibladze

On October 19, then Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili was dismissed following a tense and highly publicized political battle between herself and Nino Burjanadze, the speaker of the Georgian parliament. While the Georgian media has long speculated about the main cause for the formally popular minister's fall from grace, there is no question that her dismissal from public office is a boost for the country's struggling political opposition.

Zourabichvili has been a polarizing figure in Georgian politics since she was appointed foreign minister in March 2004. Tensions between her and the parliament exploded in October after the parliament accused Zourabichvili of 'negligence' when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was reportedly a day late delivering the Framework Convention for National Minorities. She was called in front of the parliament on October 18. Following a heated discussion at the parliament, Zourabichvili slammed the parliament for meddling in the

Ministry's affairs while she is out of the country. The parliament started calling for her dismissal following that session.

While the long-running feud between Zourabichvili and Burjanadze was held in the public arena, common wisdom held that Zourabichvili was a personal favorite of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and therefore protected from political backlash. However, after a day of consultations with both Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli and Saakashvili, Zourabichvili went on live television demanding the president dismantle the parliament and call for snap elections to rid the country of 'communist' elements that, according to her, perpetuate the corrupt 'clan' system that hinders democratic development in the country.

Immediately following the broadcast of her comments, Noghaideli announced her dismissal. She was replaced by long time Saakashvili ally Gela Bezhuashvili, at the time secretary of Georgia's National Security Council. On October 20,

Saakashvili criticized Zourabichvili for 'chaos and disorganization' in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On November 4, the government also accused the former minister of spending over a hundred thousand lari on cars without using a tender and 'thousands' of lari for journalists traveling with the minister overseas. Zourabichvili has denied any wrongdoing.

Despite the scandal surrounding her dismissal, Zourabichvili has gained broad popularity among the Georgian population. Powerful politicians within the ruling party have also spoken out in her favor, including Giorgi Khaindrava, the state minister for conflict resolution. According to Georgian press reports, he called her dismissal 'incorrect,' and praised her as 'one of the most successful' ministers. Another member of the National Movement and member of parliament, Gia Tortladze, left the ruling party on October 19, allegedly in part due to the parliament's decision to demand her resignation.

The reasons behind her sudden dismissal are still unclear. According to Zourabichvili, she stood in the way of the old 'clan' system that was used to make money through backdoor deals and shady real estate sales. Two of the four ambassadors that called for her dismissal, Irakli Chubinishvili, the Georgian ambassador to Russia and Grigol Katamadze, ambassador to Ukraine, are involved with privatization sales of Georgian MFA property. According to Zourabichvili, funds were being mishandled in those sales.

Experts have theorized she fell from grace due to her independent stance vis-à-vis parliament. The appointment of ambassadors has traditionally fallen within the jurisdiction of the parliament; Zourabichvili saw it as the responsibility of the foreign minister. This month, the parliament dismissed several of Zourabichvili's appointments to embassies overseas.

Another popular theory concerns the president's motivation for dismissing his reportedly 'favorite' minister. According to some experts, neither the United States nor the European Union liked working with Zourabichvili who was rumored to be a bad negotiator. Some point to growing political pressure as the real cause for her dismissal.

Regardless of the reasons behind her fall from grace, Zourabichvili is reaping the benefits of her newly found popularity. After her dismissal, a reported 4,000 supporters met her in Tbilisi to support her plans for a political career. This is the largest public gathering since the Rose Revolution in 2003.

Zourabichvili has been slow to commit herself to a concrete political future although she started the Salome Zourabichvili Movement on November 1. She has held two protests over concrete government actions over the past month with high attendance – which demonstrates that her support base is strong, not merely motivated by sympathy following her sudden dismissal.

Her mode of operation is also a far cry from the usual fanfare of the largely discredited Georgian opposition. She normally has clear and reasonable concerns with government actions, which is a welcome break from the 'cry wolf' tendency of the established opposition parties. Zourabichvili has also made a point to travel outside of the capital Tbilisi and the Adjara port of Batumi; most of her oppositional colleagues rarely visit the rest of the country.

While it is not clear yet how much of a difference her movement will make in the polls during the next scheduled elections, her presence in the fairly incestuous Georgian political arena is already being felt. Regardless of her future political ambitions, she is already making a difference by raising the bar for Georgian opposition leaders and giving the struggling opposition movement a well needed boost of professionalism.

WILL THE KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT BE DISSOLVED?

Joldosh Osmonov

The leader of one of the largest political parties in Kyrgyzstan, Topchubek Turgunaliyev, is with his party members collecting signatures for the dissolution of the current Kyrgyz Parliament. On July 12, 2005, following the presidential elections, the leader of the "Erkindik" party announced that they started the collection of signatures. According to Constitution of Kyrgyzstan, the collection of 300,000 signatures approved by the Central Electoral Commission would allow the issue to be put to referendum. The main reason for dissolution, as Turgunaliyev puts it, is that many deputies were elected with the support of former President Akayev. By now, the signatures have been collected and sent to the Central Electoral Commission for approval.

The "Erkindik" party, one of the largest in Kyrgyzstan, has collected the necessary amount of signatures for the dissolution of the Parliament. It is the party's second attempt to gather signatures for this purpose. The first attempt was in the summer of this year, but the CEC at that time refused to approve it. This time, according to the party's leader, all the conditions of CEC were met. Turgunaliyev told the News Agency "Gazeta.kg" that "there are 32 deputies in the current Parliament from the "Alga" party, which was created by Akayev's family. They were elected with the help of administrative recourses, mass bribery, and falsification of election results. These people were supporters of Akaev's regime. This Parliament is one of the negative remnants of the authoritarian system of government".

If the CEC approves the validity of the signatures gathered, the President has to call for a referendum. President Kurmanbek Bakiev only commented that "I will work with current Parliament and it is inexpedient to dissolve it". Prime Minister Felix Kulov also expressed his view on this issue in his interview to Akipress News Agency, noting that "if we will dissolve this parliament, we will have to

elect the same people in the next elections. If we want to change not only the people, but also the system, which I personally do not support, we have to turn to a Proportional Representation Electoral System".

Members of Parliament, in turn, do not take the idea of dissolving Parliament seriously. Melis Eshimkanov stated that it is impossible to dissolve the legislative branch in the situation of existing socio-political instability. Another member of parliament, Kubatbek Baibolov, argued that "dissolution, if it takes place, would put in doubt the legitimacy of the presidential election, and consequently, the legitimacy of president. In our current socio-political and economic situation, it would be the wrong decision".

The "Erkindik" party's leader does not agree with these opinions. He thinks that there is a need to dissolve the current Parliament in order to stabilize the situation in the country. As he said in a recent interview, people want to dissolve Parliament and if that does not happen, it is possible that there will be a new wave of disturbances in the country. Initially, one of the main goals of the March events was the dissolution of Parliament. In the case of its dissolution, according to Turgunaliyev, new elections to the Parliament could be conducted in the Spring of 2006.

Turgunaliyev was one of the founders of the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan in 1990. On February 9, 1991, he established the Democratic Party "Erkin Kyrgyzstan". Later, in 2000, it was reorganized into the Democratic Party "Erkindik". Early on, he was an Akayev supporter, but later joined the opposition. Due to his political activities, there were three criminal cases brought against him, including misappropriation of \$10,000, while he was President of Bishkek Humanitarian University in 1995. During the March revolution, he supported Bakiev and remains one of the supporters of the President.

There is theory that Turgunaliyev is carrying out a secret mission on behalf of President Bakiev. Today, the President and the Parliament disagree on various issues, and the President wants to have a trump card at hand in order to push Parliament to approve some policies proposed by the President. The Speaker of Parliament recently alleged that

regional authorities are helping the “Erkindik” party representatives gather signatures.

On December 6, “Erkindik” sent the signatures to the CEC for approval. The CEC has not yet made any statements concerning the validity of the signatures.

KAZAKHSTAN AFTER ELECTIONS: WHAT IS IN STORE FOR THE OPPOSITION?

Marat Yermukanov

Political experts were almost unanimous in predicting the disastrous defeat of the Kazakh opposition in the December presidential elections. But few expected Nursultan Nazarbayev to win a staggering 91.1% of votes, leaving his principal rival Zharmakan Tuyakbay with catastrophically low 6.6%, while other candidates received less than 2% each. With this landslide, Nazarbayev remains at the helm for another seven years. But he seems to realize that his future political success will very much depend on his ability to come to terms with the opposition.

Many factors contributed to the resounding election success of Nursultan Nazarbayev, not least his ability to win support for his election campaign even from the most impoverished strata of Kazakh society. Significantly, he reaped his highest support in the predominantly Russian-populated North Kazakhstan region (95.6%), but even in the economically backward Kyzylorda region, home base of his main opponent Zharmakhan Tuyakbay, voters’ support for him was quite impressive. During his extensive pre-election tours of the regions he addressed, in a convincing way, the most thorny problems of battling poverty and raising the living standards of the people. However insignificant, the \$22 pension rise decreed this year and the 32% boost in civil servants’ salaries won him significant popularity and public confidence. In the

political field, he successfully averted criticism over the lack of democracy by promises of political reform, including the decentralization of the government and elections of local governing bodies, enhancing civic liberties broadly outlined in his address to parliament on September 1 this year. A massive propaganda campaign coupled with half-hearted democratic efforts and partial social benefits for the poor had its effect. Not surprisingly, just before elections, former opponents of the regime left the opposition camp in droves. The main rivals of Nazarbayev, Zharmakhan Tuyakbay and Alikhan Baimenov, had nothing substantial to pledge to the electorate and their election programs sounded much like empty promises. Opposition forces were hopelessly weakened by the dramatic split within the ranks of the Ak Zhol and Communist party of Kazakhstan.

In contrast to his rivals, the President received a massive publicity boost from the Peoples’ Coalition of Kazakhstan, composed by six pro-presidential parties by his daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva, the leader of Asar (Together) party in September. The Peoples’ Coalition of Kazakhstan, transformed into a Democratic Union of Kazakhstan shortly after the elections, will apparently back Nazarbayev in implementing his promised political reforms and consolidate his position. Dariga Nazarbayeva, in her public speeches, reiterated the need to give more

powers to local legislative bodies and make regional governors accountable before the people. Her views, to some extent, clash with the conservative vision of her father who never concealed his intention to reinforce presidential power and excluded any possibility of parliamentary rule in Kazakhstan. Even long before the presidential election, some analysts were speculating that Dariga Nazarbayeva is likely to succeed her father. In a recent interview with journalists, Dariga Nazarbayeva evaded the answer to the question saying that it was up to her father to name his successor.

But for the time being, the re-elected president will have enough to deal with his opponents who refused to accept the preliminary results of the election. While Alikhan Baimenov cited “countless violations of the election law and frauds”, Zharmakhan Tuyakbay declared the election illegitimate on the grounds that authorities allegedly intimidated people into voting for Nazarbayev and obstructed the election campaigns of the For Fair Kazakhstan opposition block and appealed to the Prosecutor General’s Office. He threatened to rally up to 10,000 of his supporters for protest demonstrations if his demands are ignored by election authorities. The chairman of the Central Election Commission Onalsyn Zhumabekov, in his turn, voiced his disagreement with the critical assessment of the election results by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and in an interview to the national Khabar television channel accused the organization

of taking a lopsided view of the election. Onalsyn Zhumabekov pointed out that the dispute was caused by inaccurate translation from English of the press release distributed by OSCE after the election. Similar mild protests were expressed also by foreign minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev in an interview to Russian Interfax news agency.

For many international observers, the opposition’s protests after the election is nothing more than a storm in a teacup. Regardless, the re-election of president Nazarbayev is a *fait accompli*. It is hard to expect that the Central Election Commission would reconsider voting results. Nazarbayev will probably feel a moral obligation to thank the West, the United States above all, for his re-election. It also obliges him to display a commitment to genuine political reforms. In his public appearances after the election he called opposition leaders to cooperate “in a constructive manner” for the benefit of all people. He even offered to form a coalition government with political parties, which sounds bold and hardly conceivable in current tense situation. A coalition government may turn into a double-edged weapon in the hands of the current regime. On the one hand, it may help tame the most vociferous leaders of the opposition by granting them government posts, but on the other, if opposition members are incorporated into the government, their activities may spin out of control. However, Zharmakhan Tuyakbay rejected the idea of cooperation with the ruling elite.

NEWS DIGEST

KAZAKH OPPOSITION CANDIDATE WARNS OF 'DICTATORSHIP'

1 December

Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, the presidential candidate of the opposition bloc For a Just Kazakhstan, told AFP in a 1 December interview that a victory for incumbent President Nursultan Nazarbaev in the country's 4 December presidential election will push Kazakhstan toward dictatorship. Warning that "the political authorities in our country are going more and more toward authoritarianism and dictatorship," Tuyakbai said that if Nazarbaev is not stopped on 4 December, "In seven years' time we will be one of the worst countries in the world, like North Korea or Turkmenistan." The opposition candidate said that he felt he could force a run-off with Nazarbaev in an honest election, but expressed scant faith that the ballot will be fair. Tuyakbai stressed that the opposition will "use all constitutional means" to protest in the event of disputed results. Finally, the opposition candidate expressed disappointment at the West's rapt attention to Kazakhstan's energy potential and its relative inattention to the need for democratic reforms. (AFP)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT RULES OUT WITHDRAWAL FROM CIS

1 December

Speaking during a visit to Ukraine, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said on 1 December that he ruled out any suggestion of a Georgian withdrawal from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). He explained that although he was closely following a recent discussion of the subject in the Georgian parliament, he added that "personally, I am against Georgia's withdrawal from the Commonwealth." But Saakashvili did stress that "the CIS should be reformed and, instead of adopting declarations that are forgotten in a couple of days, it should work out concrete and real matters," and added that "CIS countries should have freedom of action." (Caucasus Press)

AZERBAIJANI AUTHORITIES CALL ON OPPOSITION TO MOVE DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE OF CAPITAL

1 December

The Baku mayor's office issued a statement on 1

December calling on the opposition to move their planned 3 December demonstration from the center of the city to a sports facility outside of the capital. The mayor's office explained that such a move is necessary to ensure public order, citing the 1 December statement by Baku police chief Maharram Aliyev in which he charged that participants in the 26 November opposition demonstration committed "illegal acts, disrupted public order and called for violence and civic disobedience." (Turan)

KEY AFGHAN BORDER CROSSING SHUT

2 December

A key border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been closed after a confrontation between soldiers from both countries. Efforts are now on to reopen the border crossing linking the Pakistani town of Chaman with Spin Boldak in Afghanistan. Both sides have accused each other of beating up their soldiers and the atmosphere remains tense, reports say. The Chaman-Spin Boldak border point is one of the two main crossing points along the porous border. An Afghan police official, Haji Abdul Wasai, told the Associated Press news agency that about a dozen Afghan soldiers fought with some 15 to 20 Pakistani troops at the border on Thursday. Three of the Afghans were hurt he said. But a Pakistani official accused the Afghan soldiers of detaining one of their soldiers and beating him. "The soldier was released late last night but he was badly thrashed," the unnamed Pakistani army official was quoted as saying by Reuters. In October, a woman and a child died at the border crossing when a bomb exploded. Tens of thousands of Afghan and Pakistani soldiers are deployed along the border as part of the hunt for al-Qaeda rebels and fighters belonging to the former Taliban regime. (BBC)

U.S. ENVOY MEETS WITH TAJIK PRESIDENT, ASKS FOR APOLOGY ON ARTICLE

2 December

Richard Hoagland, U.S. ambassador to Tajikistan, met with President Imomali Rakhmonov in Dushanbe on 1 December to discuss bilateral relations, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. At the end of the meeting, Hoagland voiced objections to a 26 November article in the state-run newspaper "Jumhuriyat." The article charged the American Bar

Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI) is undermining traditional values in Tajikistan with its seminars. Avesta reported that Hoagland addressed the newspaper's editors in a letter, calling the article a "classic example of a groundless mudslinging campaign." Calling the article an attempt to harm Tajik-U.S. relations, Hoagland said, "An apology is due not only to the United States and the U.S. Embassy, but also to President Rakhmonov and the people of Tajikistan." "Jumhuriyat" editor in chief Kamol Abdurahimov told RFE/RL that the article's author was merely exercising his right to free speech. Also on 1 December, Hoagland met with representatives of the ruling People's Democratic Party, telling them that U.S. democracy-promotion efforts in Tajikistan are not intended to spark a revolution. (RFE/RL)

SOUTH OSSETIA REPORTS ARMED CLASH WITH GEORGIAN POLICEMEN

2 December

Georgian police units have attempted to gain control of a road near the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali, South Ossetian envoy to Moscow Dmitry Medoyev said. "Four groups of Georgian riot police, about 50 in total, attempted to seize control of a bypass road outside Tskhinvali. The Georgian policemen retreated following an armed clash," Medoyev said. "Some of the Georgian policemen were wounded in the clash," he said, noting that "the Georgians wore NATO camouflage uniforms and had tents, which suggests that they were preparing a terror attack against South Ossetian officials." "This very road is used by top South Ossetian officials," Medoyev said. (Interfax)

UZBEKS JAIL 25 ANDIJAN SUSPECTS

3 December

Twenty-five men have received sentences of up to 22 years in jail in Uzbekistan in connection with a bloody uprising in the eastern town of Andijan in May. The men were sentenced after two separate trials held behind closed doors in undisclosed locations. A supreme court statement said they were guilty of carrying out murder, terrorist acts and mass riots. Fifteen men accused of masterminding the uprising were jailed last month in what was widely seen as a show trial. They were handed prison sentences of up to 20 years. The statement issued on Saturday said 13 defendants were sentenced by the Tashkent provincial court and 12 by the Tashkent city court. The precise location of the hearings was unclear as both courts were allowed to hold hearings in different parts of the

country, under Uzbek law. Uzbek authorities have confirmed that other hearings involving 58 people in relation to the Andijan violence are under way. The government says 187 people, mostly "terrorist organisers", died during the Andijan unrest. But human rights groups say 500 or more civilians may have been killed, shot by Uzbek security forces. (BBC)

CHECHNYA ANNOUNCES OFFICIAL RESULTS OF PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

3 December

The Chechen Elections Commission has announced the final official results of parliamentary elections in the North Caucasus republic, Elections Commission Chairman Ismail Baikhanov told Interfax. The commission endorsed the final vote-count records at a session on Saturday. The United Russia party has won a majority of seats in the two-house Chechen parliament and will have 24 seats in the People's Assembly (the lower chamber) and nine in the Council of the Republic (the upper chamber). The Russian Communist Party came in second in the elections and will have three seats in the People's Assembly and three in the Council of the Republic. The Union of Right Forces (SPS), which won four seats, and the Eurasian Union with one will also be represented at the parliament. There will be also 14 independent deputies. United Russia, which won 60.65% of the vote for candidates from party lists, won 14 seats in the People's Assembly, and 10 United Russia members also won seats in single-mandate districts. The Union of Right Forces party list drew 12.39% of the vote, and the Communist Party list 12.20%. Three Communist party members and one SPS member also won in single-mandate districts. The Eurasian Union party list garnered only 3.85% of the vote, which is lower than the qualification threshold. However, leader of the local division of this party Said Yusupov won a seat in the Council of the Republic in a single-mandate district, Baikhanov said. The Yabloko party received 3.15%, Rodina 2.39%, the Liberal Democratic Party 1.46%, and Narodnaya Volya 1.29% of the vote. Another 1.51% voted against all. (Interfax)

'FOUR KILLED' IN AFGHAN ATTACKS

3 December

Militants have killed the head of a district administration and three police officers in two attacks in southern Afghanistan, officials say. The head of Shah Wali Kot district in Kandahar province, Ayatullah Popal, and two security officers are said to have died in a bomb attack. Three other policemen were injured in the attack, officials say. At least one

police officer was killed and five others wounded when the vehicle they were travelling in was ambushed in neighbouring Helmand province. Officials say suspected supporters of the former Taliban regime carried out the attacks. (BBC)

GEORGIAN SHIP SINKS OFF COAST OF ITALY

4 December

A tanker sailing under the Georgian flag sank Saturday night off the coast of Italy, the Georgian Maritime Administration has told Interfax. There were 13 crewmembers, mainly Georgian nationals, aboard the tanker Margarita. All of them are alive. The Italian side offered timely help, the administration said. The tanker, en route from Genoa to Bulgaria, was caught in a powerful storm, an administration spokesman added. (Interfax)

DEFENDANT IN ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF U.S., GEORGIAN PRESIDENTS FACES LIFE

5 December

The trial of the 27-year-old Vladimir Arutyunian accused of staging a terrorist act against the U.S. and Georgian presidents, murdering a police officer and other crimes, kicked off in Tbilisi on Monday. The judge read out the indictment to the defendant, an Interfax correspondent reports from the Tbilisi City Court. Arutyunian, who faces life imprisonment, refuses to testify until he is allowed to meet with representatives of international human rights organizations and ombudsman in Georgia Sozar Subari. Hearings will resume Tuesday, December 6. (Interfax)

KAZAKH ELECTION 'NOT DEMOCRATIC'

5 December

Sunday's presidential election in Kazakhstan failed to meet international democratic standards, Europe's main poll-monitoring body the OSCE has said. Failings included ballot box stuffing, intimidation of the opposition, and media bias, the OSCE said. It said its 460 monitors had noted some improvements from previous elections, but flaws "limited the possibility for a meaningful competition". President Nursultan Nazarbayev, in power since 1989, won 91% of the vote. "Regrettably, despite some efforts which were undertaken to improve the process, the authorities did not exhibit sufficient political will to hold a genuinely good election," said Bruce George, co-ordinator for observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. In a strongly-worded statement,

the OSCE said: "The voting was generally calm and peaceful, but the process deteriorated during the count, which was viewed as bad or very bad in one out of four counts observed. "Unauthorised persons interfering in polling stations, cases of multiple voting, ballot box stuffing and pressure on students to vote were observed during voting and during the count, observers saw tampering with result protocols and a wide range of procedural violations," it said. Main opposition candidate Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, who secured just 6.64% of the vote according to official results, alleged there had been "multiple violations". "We will take all legal measures to protest the official results of the voting and will press for this election to be declared invalid," Mr Tuyakbai said on Monday. "The authoritarian regime of Nazarbayev is taking a totalitarian turn," he said. But President Nazarbayev insisted that the results demonstrated the population's craving for the status quo. "We're talking not about revolutions but evolutions," he told reporters. "Kazakhstan voted for calmness and stability." (BBC)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT REPORTEDLY REBUKED ENVOY TO U.S.

6 December

President Kurmanbek Bakiev issued a resolution on 30 November formally rebuking Zamira Sydykova, Kyrgyzstan's ambassador to the United States, for statements she made about the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan. In mid-November, Sydykova spoke to the "Financial Times" and "The New York Times" about negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and the United States over payments for the use of the base. The Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry later said that Sydykova had not been authorized to make such statements. (akipress.org)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER ADDRESSES SUCCESSION ISSUE

6 December

Darigha Nazarbaeva, the daughter of Kazakh President Nazarbaev, told a briefing in Astana on 6 December that she does not rule out a possible presidential run in 2012. She told journalists, "In a year or two we'll examine this issue." On the question of success, Nazarbaeva said that her father would have "the final say" on choosing a successor. "We may not see this politician yet. But we've seen the Russian experience, where [President] Vladimir Putin was unexpectedly thrust onto the political stage," she said. (Kazakhstan Today)

KAZAKH FOREIGN MINISTER DISPUTES OSCE ELECTION REPORT

6 December

Addressing the annual gathering of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) foreign ministers in Ljubljana on 6 December, Kazakh Foreign Minister Qasymzhomart Toqaev disputed the organization's critical stance on Kazakhstan's 4 December presidential election. Toqaev expressed his "decisive disagreement with the negative assessments of the political process in our country by the [OSCE's] Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR]." "Kazakhstan is not prepared to dramatize the ODIHR assessments, but they are, in essence, biased. For this reason, they have raised doubts in our country about ODIHR," he added. Toqaev blamed the OSCE's "technical approach" to election monitoring, arguing that it fails to take into account historical context. The OSCE's preliminary assessment of the election said that it "did not meet a number of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections." (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

125 CHECHEN REFUGEES RETURN FROM GEORGIA

6 December

A hundred and twenty-five Chechen refugees who lived in Georgia's Pankisi gorge over the past several years arrived in Russia on Tuesday evening, the Russian presidential Envoy in the Southern Federal District Dmitry Kozak told journalists. "The refugees were taken to Makhachkala in an Emergency Situations Ministry plane. From there they were taken to Grozny in five buses. They have been quartered in temporary housing, four people to a room. The people were supplied with hot food and all the necessities," Kozak said. The refugee problem in the Pankisi gorge is almost solved, Kozak said. "Everyone who wanted to return to their homeland has been able to do it," he said. The refugees' return was possible thanks to efforts of the Federal Migration Service, Kozak said. (Interfax)

MEETING OF THE PRESIDENT OF AZERBAIJAN ILHAM ALIYEV WITH THE PRESIDENT OF PAKISTAN PERVEZ MUSHARRAF

7 December

As is reported, within the framework of the Third Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Conference, on December 7, President of the Azerbaijan Republic Ilham Aliyev has met in the city of Mecca the President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Pervez Musharraf. During the meeting, the sides expressed satisfaction with expansion of mutual relations in various areas, including successful development of cooperation in political, economic and other spheres. The head of the states have emphasized confidence on the further expansion of connections between Azerbaijan and Pakistan, having expressed satisfaction with constant development of cooperation within the framework of the international organizations, including OIC. President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has interested in the work done in connection with liquidation of heavy consequences of earthquake, which have occurred in Pakistan. The president of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf has expressed gratitude for the help rendered by the government of Azerbaijan in this connection. President Pervez Musharraf also was interested in process of settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The head of the Azerbaijan state Ilham Aliyev has informed on going process of the negotiations connected to peace settlement of the problem. The head of the Pakistani state has once again emphasized the position of his country on the question of the fair resolution to conflict within the framework of territorial integrity and inviolability of borders of Azerbaijan. At the meeting, also exchanged were views on a number of other questions representing mutual interest. (AzerTag)

BAKU: ARMENIAN RECOGNITION OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH MAY MEAN WAR

7 December

Yerevan's recognition of Nagorno- Karabakh's independence may lead to war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Azerbaijani Defense Ministry press service told Interfax on Wednesday. Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiyev told as much to U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense James MacDougal on December 5 in Baku. "The Armenian authorities say that they may recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. Should this happen, military actions would be renewed," the press service cited Abiyev. (Interfax)

NATO AGREES TO EXPAND AFGHAN ROLE

8 December

Nato foreign ministers meeting in Brussels have endorsed a plan to expand the alliance's role in Afghanistan. It will involve deploying 6,000 more troops in the south of the country, a third of them expected to be British. Thursday's agreement is set to make Nato's Afghanistan mission its biggest ever operation outside Europe. The south and east have

been the scene of intense violence which has this year left more than 1,400 dead, making it the deadliest year since 2001. BBC defence correspondent Rob Watson says that some member states have been worried about potential casualties among their troops, which has made reaching Thursday's agreement difficult. "We have today agreed to move Nato's support for peace and security in Afghanistan to a new level," Nato foreign ministers said in a statement. The agreement provides for a new British-led Nato headquarters in Kabul. Our correspondent says that to ease the concerns of some member states, it is being stressed that the troops' mission will be to promote peace and stability, and not to hunt down members of al-Qaeda and the Taleban. That will remain the job of the US-led operation Enduring Freedom. (BBC)

JUSTICE MINISTER DENIES SECRET PRISONS LOCATED ON AZERBAIJANI TERRITORY

8 December

Reports of a secret CIA prison on Azerbaijani territory are "an invention," Azerbaijani Justice Minister Fikret Mamedov told journalists in Baku on 8 December. Mamedov added that the investigation launched by the Council of Europe last month following the publication in "The Washington Times" of a report that the CIA transfers maintains a network of secret prisons in Europe and elsewhere where suspected terrorists are detained and questioned has nothing to do with Azerbaijan. (day.az)

SOUTH OSSETIA ACCUSES GEORGIA OF FRAMING ARRESTED POLICE OFFICER

8 December

South Ossetian Interior Minister Mikhail Mindzaev claimed on 8 December that Georgian police planted counterfeit U.S. dollar bills on Vyacheslav Gudiev, a South Ossetian police officer arrested in the conflict zone on 5 December. Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli told NATO officials last month that the territory of South Ossetia is used to produce counterfeit euros and U.S. dollars. U.S. experts are working with Georgian police to try to determine where in the conflict zone those counterfeiting operations are taking place. Also on 8 December, a Tbilisi City Court remanded Gudiev in pretrial detention for three months on charges of selling counterfeit currency and illegal possession of weapons. (Caucasus Press)

KAZAKH AMBASSADOR TO UK CALLS THE OSCE STATEMENT ARGUABLE

9 December

Yerlan Idrissov, ambassador of Kazakhstan to Great Britain, regrets that some estimations of the presidential election in Kazakhstan in foreign media are prejudiced. He has stated this at a briefing in London organised for British MPs. "The OSCE statement was arguable and not fully balanced," - the diplomat says, and, at the same time, "many Western, particularly, British media covered only the negative part of the OSCE statement ignoring its positive part, as well as estimations by other international observers." In his view, such coverage is unlikely to promote an objective picture about the processes in Kazakhstan among Western readers. At the same time the diplomat observed that Kazakhstan was a young growing state and therefore not all of its institutions were perfect. But what is obvious is successes of Kazakhstan and its sincere wish to achieve further growth and self-perfection, to eliminate errors including those committed in the election process, from which nobody is secure and which nobody wants to conceal. (Kazakhstan today)

ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT PROLONGS MANDATE OF IRAQ PEACEKEEPERS

9 December

Parliament deputies approved on 8 December by a vote of 73 in favor, 12 against, and one abstention, to prolong for a further year the mandate of Armenia's peacekeeping force currently deployed in south-central Iraq as part of a Polish-led international division, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The opposition Artarutian faction, which voted against the peacekeepers' initial deployment one year ago, was not present in parliament for the vote. The 45 Armenian peacekeepers are almost all doctors, demining experts, or drivers of military vehicles. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN, US DISCUSS PARTNERSHIP IN CUSTOMS

9 December

The customs services of Azerbaijan and the United States discussed a draft agreement on cooperation in the sphere of customs. The discussions were held as part of the visit of an Azerbaijani delegation headed by Aydin Aliyev, deputy chairman of the SCC, to the United States under the Program on border security and export control, implemented in Azerbaijan by the US government, the SCC announced. Initially, the meetings were held with the senior officials of the US Customs and Border Service of the US Domestic Security Department. During the visit the delegation will get familiar with the automated system on cargo

control, definition and appraisal of risks, as well as organization and realization of audit. They also agreed upon intensifying the signing of the said agreement with the United States. The meetings were held at the training office for development, which was founded in 1993 and in the shortest period was expanded three times and provides training for over 110,000 employees of the US Border and Customs Service. Along with it, the SCC officials got familiar with the experience in implementation of the Air and Marine programs of the US Border and Customs Service. Visit of the SCC delegation, implemented at the financial support of the US Border and Customs Service, started on December 3 is due to complete on December 16. (Baku Today)

UNESCO DELEGATION TO VISIT AZERBAIJAN

9 December

UNESCO delegation headed by director of education and planning department Mirasgar Hussein is to visit Azerbaijan on December 13-17, according to the Ministry of Education. The delegation is expected to hold here a number of meetings to discuss the issues concerning development of education, improvement of teachers' professional skills and other important problems to be solved under the memorandum of mutual understanding signed between UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. (AzeTag)

GEORGIA DENIES HOSTING SECRET CIA PRISON

9 December

Georgian Justice Minister Kote Kemularia and his deputy, Givi Mikanadze, separately denied on 8 December that there are one or more secret U.S. detention facilities in Georgia. Dmitrii Medoev, who is the permanent representative in Moscow of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, told regnum.ru in a telephone interview on 7 December that in light of what he termed Tbilisi's subservience to the CIA, he is certain that such prisons exist on Georgian territory, and he called on the international community to set about locating them. (RFE/RL)

BUSH URGES KAZAKHSTAN TO INVESTIGATE VOTING FLAWS

10 December

U.S. President George W. Bush on Saturday congratulated Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, on his re-election and urged him to investigate allegations of voting irregularities. Nazarbayev told Bush that his government was prepared to investigate the charges, the White House

said. Nazarbayev won re-election by a landslide on Monday in the central Asian state, but international observers branded the vote flawed, citing ballot box stuffing and the intimidation of opposition campaigners. Blair Jones, a White House spokesman, said Bush called Nazarbayev to "congratulate him on his re-election and to highlight the importance of continued democratic reform in Kazakhstan." "Allegations of irregularities in the election were noted and the (U.S.) president stressed the importance of Kazakhstan investigating the facts related to these allegations," Jones said. "Nazarbayev said Kazakhstan is prepared to investigate the facts provided to them." The landslide win for Nazarbayev, in power since 1989, means he will rule the Central Asian state for another seven years. Under his rule, Kazakhstan reformed its economy and is set to become one of the world's top 10 oil producers in the next decade as it develops new oil fields in the Caspian Sea. (Reuters)

POLICE KILLED IN TALEBAN ASSAULT

10 December

Seven police officers and five Taleban fighters have been killed during an assault on government offices in southern Afghanistan. Police said militants armed with machine guns and rockets attacked district offices in Helmand province. Helmand has seen a major escalation in violence this year. Britain is to send troops there in the New Year as part of a Nato expansion. Militant-linked violence in Afghanistan has killed more than 1,400 this year. The BBC's Andrew North in Kabul says the attack in Garmser district appeared to be a well-coordinated one on a small and largely untrained police force in one of the most lawless parts of the country. He says there are mounting fears from many quarters that the four-year-old Taleban-led insurgency is getting worse. Police chief Haji Bahadur Khan said at least six other officers were wounded in three hours of fighting at the offices. Some other militants may have been wounded, but managed to escape after the fighting, Mr Khan said. He said the administrative buildings and four police vehicles were damaged in the early morning assault. A spokesman for the Taleban movement, Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, told the AFP news agency that 90 of its fighters had carried out the attack. Our correspondent says Helmand is one of the most challenging areas for the government of President Hamid Karzai and the international security forces. In October, 18 police were killed after a Taleban ambush on their convoy. In July, Taleban fighters killed four policemen in another ambush and captured another six, who they beheaded. Britain has about 100 troops and civilian advisers in

Helmand preparing for the arrival of several thousand soldiers next year. One of their chief objectives will be to try to find ways of tackling the drugs trade there - Afghanistan's No 1 opium-producing region - amid reports that militants and drug traffickers work closely together. (BBC)

TWO SUICIDE BELTS FOUND IN CHECHNYA **11 December**

A cache containing two explosive belts packed with four kilograms of plastique and two kilograms of TNT has been discovered outside the village of Urdyukhoi in Chechnya's Shatoi district. Three mines, electric detonators and other items of ammunition were confiscated from the cache as well, a source in the republic's Interior Ministry told Interfax. A plastic bag containing a Borz assault rifle, seven blocks of TNT, five grenades and five detonators has been found near the village of Roshni-Chu in Chechnya's Urus-Martan district. An investigation is underway. (Interfax)

USA ALLOCATES 15 MLN FOR DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY IN AZERBAIJAN

11 December

United States Development Agency has allocated 15 million dollars for the program on development of democracy in Azerbaijan. Ambassador of this country to Azerbaijan Rino Harnish said this program is meant for 5 years and would be directed to numerous projects in development of democracy in the frame of the said program, as well as strengthening of civil society institutions. Besides, the United States Government has started another \$11 million project to continue the projects for development of communities. (AzerTag)

RUSSIAN COMPANY BUYS KYRGYZ CELL OPERATOR FROM KAZAKH INVESTORS

12 December

Russia's MobileTelesystems (MTS), the country's largest cellular operator, announced on 12 December that it has acquired a 51 percent stake in Kyrgyz cellular operator Bitel from Kazakhstan's Alliance Capital for \$150 million. MTS also acquired an option to buy out the rest of Bitel by the end of 2006. Alliance, which reports have linked to the family of former Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev, has been embroiled in a conflict with Russia's Alfa Group since Alliance acquired Bitel this spring. MTS CEO Vassilii Sidorov played down the risks of ongoing litigation, saying, "We would not do a deal if we were

not certain we could eliminate those risks." Bitel is Kyrgyzstan's largest mobile operator, with nearly 500,000 subscribers and an almost 90-percent market share. MTS estimates that by 2010 there will be 2-3 million cell phone users in Kyrgyzstan. (Reuters)

TATAR YOUTH ORGANIZATION WARNS AGAINST RUSSIFICATION

13 December

The Tatar youth organization Liberty (Azatlyk) met in Naberezhnie Chelny on 10 December and passed a resolution criticizing what it called President Putin's policies that are promoted by unnamed politicians and commentators and aimed at Russifying the peoples of the Russian Federation. The document said that Putin's efforts to foster a single national identity for all the peoples of the federation includes promoting the "leading role of the [Great] Russian nation" and language to the detriment of the identities, languages, and cultures of other nations and denying those nations the "right to decolonization and self-determination." The declaration suggested that the Tatars have "for centuries" worked for the benefit of the "Russian empire...[against] their own will and interests." (RFE/RL)

RFE/RL TASHKENT BUREAU LOSES ACCREDITATION

13 December

In a 12 December letter, Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry informed RFE/RL acting President Jeff Trimble that it has denied the Tashkent bureau of RFE/RL's Uzbek Service an extension of its accreditation. The letter accused RFE/RL of violating Uzbek legislation by employing the services of stringers who "engage in journalist activity without accreditation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." The ministry also suspended the accreditation of four RFE/RL Uzbek Service correspondents who held individual accreditation. Trimble responded in a statement, saying, "This unwarranted action by Uzbek authorities further erodes the already dismal state of free speech in Uzbekistan and is yet another attack by the Karimov government on the basic human rights of the Uzbek people. While hindered, RFE/RL will not be deterred in its efforts to report accurately and objectively about events in Uzbekistan to the people of that country and throughout Central Asia and the rest of our broadcast region." (RFE/RL)