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ANALYTICAL ARTICLES:

KABARDINO-BALKARIA RISKS BECOMING
NEW INSURGENCY HOTSPOT
Emil Souleimanov

HOW SERIOUS IS AZERBAIJAN'S
ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN?
Scott Rosenblum

NAZARBAYEV'S VISIT TO CHINA REVEALS
KAZAKHSTAN'S BALANCING STRATEGY
Roman Muzalevsky

ARMENIA'S RULING COALITION
DEEPENS COOPERATION
Haroutiun Khachatrian

FIELD REPORTS:

VIDEO RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT
A TAJIK FIGHTER'S DEATH
Alexander Sodiqov

TURKISH PRIME MINISTER
VISITS KYRGYZSTAN
Joldosh Osmonov

AZERBAIJAN SEEKS TO CURB
RAMPANT CORRUPTION
Mina Muradova

U.S. ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE
ROBERT BLAKE VISITS UZBEKISTAN
Erkin Akhmadov

NEWS DIGEST



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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Contents

Analytical Articles

- KABARDINO-BALKARIA RISKS BECOMING NEW INSURGENCY HOTSPOT** 3
Emil Souleimanov
- HOW SERIOUS IS AZERBAIJAN'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN?** 6
Scott Rosenblum
- NAZARBAYEV'S VISIT TO CHINA REVEALS KAZAKHSTAN'S BALANCING STRATEGY** 9
Roman Muzalevsky
- ARMENIA'S RULING COALITION DEEPENS COOPERATION** 12
Haroutiun Khachatrian

Field Reports

- VIDEO RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT A TAJIK FIGHTER'S DEATH** 15
Alexander Sodiqov
- TURKISH PRIME MINISTER VISITS KYRGYZSTAN** 16
Joldosh Osmonov
- AZERBAIJAN SEEKS TO CURB RAMPANT CORRUPTION** 18
Mina Muradova
- U.S. ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE ROBERT BLAKE VISITS UZBEKISTAN** 19
Erkin Akhmadov

- News Digest** 21

THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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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 1,100 and 1,500 words. The articles are structured as follows:

KEY ISSUE: A short 75-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.

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 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: <scornell@jhu.edu> and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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KABARDINO-BALKARIA RISKS BECOMING NEW INSURGENCY HOTSPOT

Emil Souleimanov

On February 19, three Russian tourists were killed in the mountainous Elbrus area of Kabardino-Balkaria by local Islamist insurgents, with two others escaping with serious injuries. Since Fall 2010, a series of audacious attacks have been carried out by insurgents, claiming the lives of the republic's mufti Anas Pshikhachev, the prominent Kabardey ethnologist Arsen Tsipinov, and a number of police officers and state officials. These recent events have contributed to making Kabardino-Balkaria one of the major hotspots of the North Caucasian insurgency, along with Dagestan.

BACKGROUND: Until recently, the Northwest Caucasus had been considered rather immune to the manifestations of militant Islamism. Unlike the ethnic autonomous regions of the Northeast Caucasus, i.e. Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya, these tiny republics with less than a million (Kabardino-Balkaria) and half a million (Karachay-Cherkessia) inhabitants, with a sizable share of ethnic Russians, were significantly Europeanized during decades of Soviet rule. Importantly, local societies largely lack the attributes contributing to the swift mobilization in the Northeast Caucasus: the prevalence of highly traditional societies including tribalism, blood feuds, and a strong role for Islam in the public and private spheres.

Yet life in both republics is marked by considerable tension between representatives of Turkic (Karachay, Balkar) and Adyghe (Cherkess, Kabardey, Abaza) groups that does not confine itself only to the nationalist pamphlets of local (pseudo) historians. Economic and political power is concentrated almost entirely in the hands of demographically dominant Kabardians and Karachays in their respective republics, causing permanent discontent among groups that consider themselves discriminated against. Following

centuries of forced migrations implemented by Russian authorities in attempts to pacify the region, ethnic groups also clash over certain disputed territories.

As a result, the ethno-nationalist split seemed to be the main, if not single, ideological force in the Northwest Caucasus only a decade ago. Yet the hunt for real and imagined "Wahhabis" in the North Caucasus that started in 1999-2001 and intensified during the desperate Nalchik attack of 2005, led by the first generation of local insurgents, provided for a deepening "Jihadization" of the political opposition. The ongoing process has been fueled by the strong desire among local youth to distance themselves from the Turkic-Adyghe split, put an end to the power of corrupt elites, retaliate against indiscriminate activities of the local police, and establish an independent Islamic state in the North Caucasus.

IMPLICATIONS: The ongoing deterioration of the security situation in Kabardino-Balkaria testifies to the inability of local authorities to really combat terrorism, even though that task should have been the easiest in this particular part of the North Caucasus. Like elsewhere in the region, the brutal and unprofessional efforts of local security forces to rid the country of

“Wahhabis” have only contributed to strengthening the Islamist insurgency (see the 09/29/2010 issue of the CACI Analyst).

The main concern of the current president, Arsen Kanokov, and his close circle is widely believed by locals to be making money, and maximizing his control over political and economic power to this end. Following his inauguration in 2005, Kanokov, an ethnic Kabardey, made sure that revenues from the lucrative tourist business in the Elbrus area were channeled to the Kabardeys. His predecessor and fellow Kabardey Valery Kokov had earlier conceded such income to the Balkar minority, and Kanokov’s move further infuriated the Balkars. Corruption is omnipresent in the republic, and positions in the state administration are almost openly sold or delivered to loyal people, while political opposition is reduced to zero. Locals are systematically forced to pay bribes to establish any business.

In this situation, the Islamist militants are regarded by some as the only real opposition to the extremely unpopular regime. Regardless of the authorities’ continuous anti-Salafi rhetorics, a recent survey disclosed that 39 percent of Kabardino-Balkaria’s inhabitants have a rather positive attitude toward Salafism. The nationalist appeal is also important in shaping pro-insurgency sentiments, since traditions of anti-Russian resistance by numerous Adyghe tribes during the 19th century still constitute the cornerstone of Adyghe identity today. For the young generation of nationalist Kabardeys, facing high unemployment rates and virtually no prospects, a feeling of being ethnic kin to the “tough guys of ours” that are not by any means “worse than the Chechens” also plays a role as they are searching for an idea that would provide meaning to their lives. Likewise, in the

case of the Karachay-Balkars, the memory of the bloody deportation of 1944 and consequent hardships still persist. The Turkic groups, mostly inhabiting remote mountainous areas of the Greater Caucasus, are highly traditional and generally more prone to mobilization than the more westernized Adyghe concentrated mostly in the lowlands.

Contributing to the anti-regime, anti-Moscow, and to some extent also anti-Russian animosity on the one hand, and to the forging of an idea of Turco-Adyghe solidarity on the other, are the growing anti-Caucasian sentiments in Russia proper, where inhabitants of the North Caucasus are increasingly regarded as second-class citizens. Recent developments boost the motto of local insurgents: “Let’s fight the Russians and their local puppets – they are our real enemies, as we are all Muslims and should not care about ethnicity”.

In this regard, Tsipinov’s assassination is highly emblematic as he advocated the revival of ethnic values among the Adyghe peoples, most notably the *Adyghe Habze*, the archaic and highly complex principles of customary law and code of etiquette. Tsipinov did not hesitate to term Islam an alien segment of Adyghe identity, and Karachay-Balkars as inferior to the cultivated and autochthonous Adyghe. While the insurgents considered Tsipinov a propagator of jahiliyyah, i.e. pre-Islamic paganism, who also contributed to the further deepening of the Turco-Adyghe divide, the pro-regime mufti was renowned for his bold “anti-Wahhabi” statements. The attacks against the Baksan hydropower plant in July 2010 and more recently against the tourist infrastructure were carried out to deprive the regime of its revenues, and showing whom the republic really belongs to.

Yet the increasingly violent activities of local insurgents have also brought about significant opposition within Kabardino-Balkaria, most notably in liberal urban areas. A group calling itself the “Black hawks” has been established – allegedly by local inhabitants – to fight “Wahhabi terrorism” by their own means, though some observers believe they are an initiative of Russian intelligences services. Most importantly, some Kabardey and Balkar intellectuals have called for the revival of the ancient custom of blood feud, arguing that taking revenge on the relatives of the insurgents would weaken insurgent activities, a measure that has been practiced quite successfully in Chechnya and increasingly also in Ingushetia and Dagestan. In response to the increasingly frequent and lethal insurgent attacks on police outposts, these have been removed altogether, and the authorities are now discussing the launch of special militia units for fighting insurgents.

CONCLUSIONS: The recent increase of Islamist insurgency in Kabardino-Balkaria, an autonomous republic whose Jihadist-related civil unrest has been limited in the regional context, clearly illustrates the overall failure of the anti-terrorist efforts of both local and federal authorities. Not only do the ambitious economic plans of the newly established North Caucasian federal district seem out of touch with reality (for example, Alexander Khloponin’s desire to turn Kabardino-Balkaria and adjacent republics into a tourist paradise), but some areas of the republic have recently fallen under the partial control of the insurgents

who have even started to extort money from local businesses and intimidate officials. With its large areas of wooded mountains and gorges, the republic provides perfect terrain for guerilla fighting. Importantly, Kabardino-Balkaria neighbors the predominantly Muslim areas of the Digoron sub-ethnic group of Ossetians, among which radicalization is on the rise due to frequent cases of police discrimination within North Ossetia. Kabardey-Balkar jamaats have been improving their sense of trans-ethnic Muslim solidarity and have consistently strengthened their ties with Digoron Ossetians, thereby establishing a strategic link between the Northwest Caucasus and the key Northeast Caucasian battlefields. This poses a serious danger to the security of the 2014 Olympic games in Sochi and holds the potential to further destabilize neighboring Karachay-Cherkessia, as well as the predominantly Russian areas of Stavropol and Krasnodar. If the situation in Kabardino-Balkaria deteriorates further, Moscow may use the Chechenization model, pitting local “Wahhabis” and “anti-Wahhabis”, who are usually nationalists, against each other, or alternatively intensify the Turco-Adyghe antagonism as a tool to prevent both groups from unification based on Islamism.

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HOW SERIOUS IS AZERBAIJAN'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN?

Scott Rosenblum

In the past month, the Azerbaijani Government has launched a massive anti-corruption campaign, raising eyebrows both among ordinary people and international observers. The question on everyone's mind is whether this campaign is a long-term policy or a temporary measure to prevent Middle-East type social unrest, as the opposition claims. Although it is too early to say, some signs indicate that these efforts may have a more sustainable nature, thus raising hopes for an improvement in the business and development climate in the country.

BACKGROUND: Azerbaijan has been accustomed to being ranked by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. In late 1990s, it was even ranked among the top three most corrupt nations, although in the subsequent years the ranking improved thanks to the establishment of a state commission on anti-corruption measures, and the adoption of relevant legislation that required public officials to disclose their assets on an annual basis. However, the amount of corruption in the country has not diminished, as has been clearly evident both to local people and outside investors.

Several factors account for the high level of corruption in the country. On the one hand, the legacy of corruption in the region dates back to Soviet and even pre-Soviet times. The long-lasting tradition of stealing public funds and abusing public office for personal enrichment was already deeply entrenched in the minds of public servants when the country became independent. And although the Soviet regime fought corruption in its early stages, later on the social disease became widespread and a general practice. The state collapse of the early 1990s only made matters worse, turning corruption into a way of life.

What makes corruption in Azerbaijan more unique is the sudden influx of massive amounts of oil revenues. A country that is still young and in the process of developing its government institutions is simply not able to digest all of this cash. Traditional Western watchdog institutions, such as the media, civil society, opposition parties, Parliament and audit chambers are very new themselves, and are going through painful processes of capacity building, internal mobilization and consolidation. Most of these institutions are corrupt themselves – including those who are supposed to fight against corruption. This is true also in the non-governmental sector: abuse of grants by NGO heads has been the subject of many jokes among the public. In sum, the system of checks and balances in the country is still very much missing.

At the same time, citing the war with Armenia and the country's precarious geopolitical situation, bordered by hungry great powers, the government has argued that Azerbaijan requires its own path for state-building. The leadership seems to have preferred the loyalty of its cabinet members and the stability of the regime over efforts to clean up corruption, which would have required – as in Georgia – the arrest of influential government officials.



(News.Az)

All of this was true until January 27, 2011, when President Ilham Aliyev made a now famous speech at the meeting of Cabinet of Ministers and launched a new drive against corruption in the country. Since then, the issue became the most discussed in the print media and national TV. Ministers and various state officials started making remarks about the importance to fight the corruption. Each state entity has held its own session to condemn corruption and develop measures to fight it; across the government bodies and government-controlled media outlets, the struggle against corruption has become the new rhetorical centerpiece.

IMPLICATIONS: It is too early to determine what the results of this new campaign will be. Government officials like to repeat that this is

not a campaign, because a “campaign” has temporary connotations. Instead, they insist that these efforts are part of a long-term and sustainable government policy. Yet, the majority of population still has to be convinced that these measures are sincere, long-term and will have a practical impact on their lives.

So far, only mid-level officials have been fired from their jobs on charges of corruption. Each ministry and government agency has reported firing several dozen corrupt officials. Although these measures have yet to generate substantial change in the work of those mega-state entities, they do carry a potentially important symbolic nature.

Two cases of dismissals nevertheless indicate that the recent anti-corruption policy might be

more serious than it is thought of. In February, the head of the “AzerSu” state monopoly for water distribution, and the head of the nationwide prison system were both dismissed from their positions. Both organizations have been notorious for corruption, but few believed that the country’s leadership would sacrifice top officials. Neither has yet been charged with criminal cases. Opposition newspapers continue to speculate and report that several other key officials are next in line.

While it may be wise to conduct anti-corruption measures in a gradual pace, rather than by Bolshevik methods, only firing and replacing government officials is unlikely to produce sustainable results. More sustainable measures are needed to combat corruption, especially in such areas as education, health care, police and local government. The salaries of public employees must be increased, audit measures must be strengthened, and awareness of the rights and responsibilities of public servants and citizens must be promoted.

If that happens and the level of corruption in the country decreases, that would have a significant impact on the business climate, which will help GDP to grow, with lesser dependence on oil revenues, which have driven Azerbaijan’s rapid growth. More specifically, customs regulations and business registration procedures must be cleaned up and tax inspections must be reduced so that local businesses and foreign investors can operate freely in the country. A majority of economic experts believe that the country has enormous potential for development of the non-oil sector, and that corruption and red tape are the chief obstacles for this to happen.

CONCLUSIONS: Many members of the opposition accuse the government of insincerity

in the recent anti-corruption drive. They link it to the events in the Middle East, and to the Azerbaijani government’s alleged fear of revolution, and thus attribute it to preventive measures to stave off unrest.

Some degree of truth undoubtedly exists in these accusations. At the same time, it is important to observe that the government is showing signs of flexibility and willingness to adapt to new realities in order to maintain stability and economic development. Thus, one can argue that state-society relations are susceptible to change and that the government adapts in the face of new conditions and circumstances.

The fact that President Aliyev signed a decree allocating 25% of all fines from traffic police and custom to the salaries of policemen and customs officers is a positive sign towards making anti-corruption measures more sustainable. He has also required most of the payments of such fines to be made through banks and not in cash. Similar actions are needed in the education and health care sectors. Local government officials have already been instructed to treat citizens and their requests differently: with more care, accountability and responsiveness. If this happens, ordinary citizens may feel the difference in real life. Yet, if no major changes are implemented to reduce government bureaucracy, people are likely to lose faith in this campaign and in the government’s promises in general, thus laying the foundation for increased social unrest in the country.

Time will tell whether the anti-corruption drive in Azerbaijan is sincere or merely cosmetic. But it is too early to dismiss it.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Scott Rosenblum is a Tbilisi-based freelance writer.

NAZARBAYEV'S VISIT TO CHINA REVEALS KAZAKHSTAN'S BALANCING STRATEGY

Roman Muzalevsky

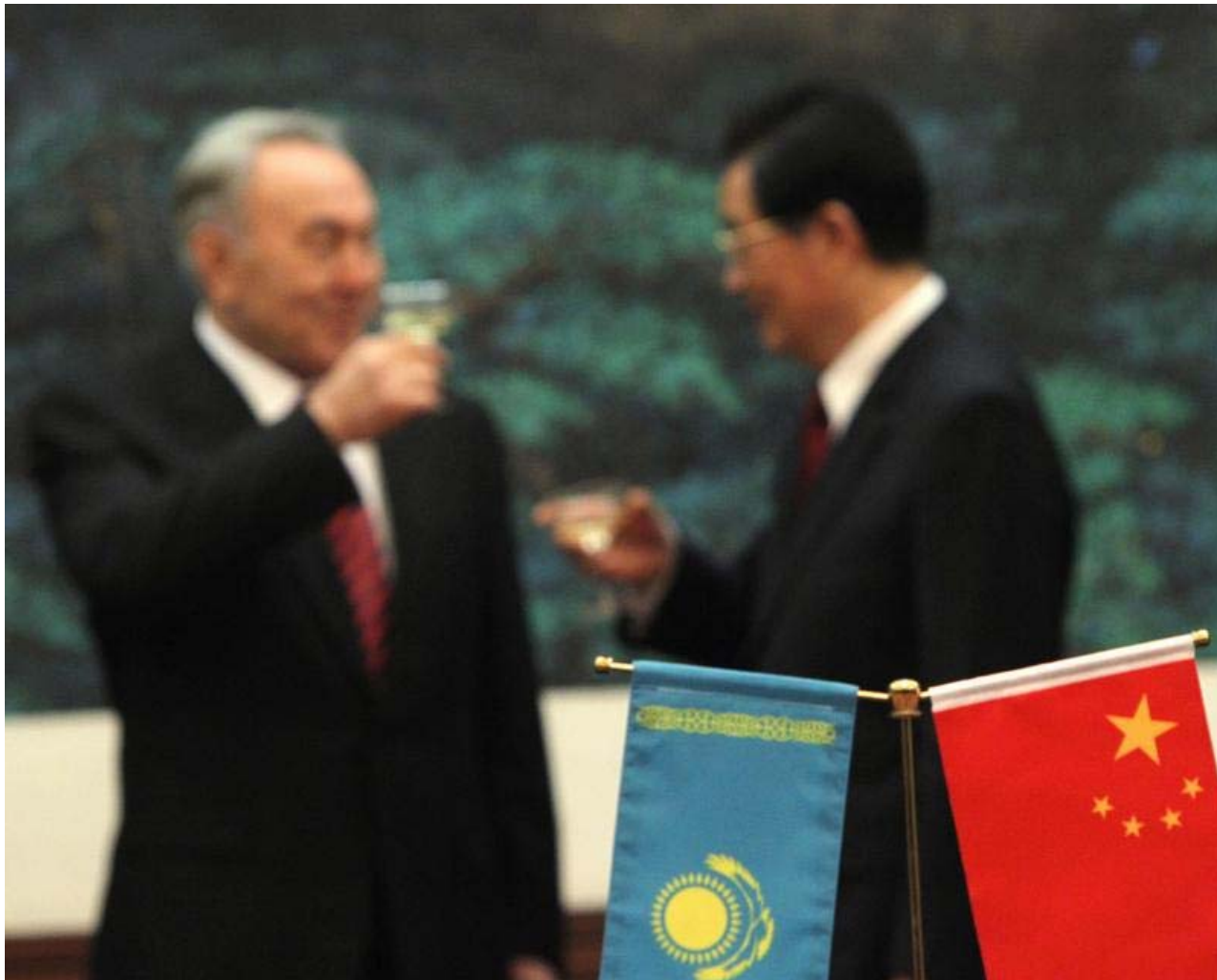
Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's visit to China on February 21-23 was his fifteenth since Kazakhstan's independence. Yet few have observed that Kazakhstan's relations with China, resting on expanding energy collaboration since the 1990s, are today evolving to reflect rapidly growing cooperation in areas as diverse as manufacturing, shipbuilding, transport, technology, and trade. It is in these areas that Nazarbayev has secured monumental deals during his visit to the "Middle Kingdom", and it is development of these sectors that, with a balanced approach, could consolidate rather than weaken the sovereignty of Kazakhstan in the long run.

BACKGROUND: During his three-day visit to China, Nazarbayev met with President Hu Jintao, the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress Wu Bangguo, and the Premier of the State Council Wen Jiabao. The sides signed eight agreements in the spheres of energy, industrial financing, and transport. China agreed to lend US\$ 1.7 billion to the Kazakh sovereign wealth fund Samruk-Kazyna and provide a US\$ 5 billion dollar loan for a petrochemical complex. More than 1,000 Chinese companies are currently active in Kazakhstan's energy, manufacturing, and transport sectors.

Nazarbayev's visit has secured the participation of the China National Petroleum Corporation to develop the Urikhtau gas field in western Kazakhstan and US\$ 1 billion from Beijing to build an oil refinery in the Kazakh city of Atyrau. Chinese firms are now acquiring assets across the Caspian region. In Kazakhstan, Chinese companies account for a fifth of the country's oil production. This has allowed China to surpass Russia's stake in Kazakhstan's oil production by a factor of 2.5. Most recently, the Chinese private oil firm MIE has acquired assets of the Kazakh oil and gas explorer Emir Oil for US\$ 170 million.

During the visit, the sides also set out to expand their nuclear energy cooperation, with Kazakhstan agreeing to supply China with 55,000 tons of uranium. Nazarbayev emphasized that Kazakhstan was ready to meet 40 percent of China's uranium needs. The country's uranium resources, the second largest in the world, constitute 19 percent of global reserves. In 2009, Kazakhstan became the world's largest producer of uranium, beating rivals like Canada and Australia. The nuclear energy deal reflects another important facet of the growing bilateral energy cooperation.

The countries further agreed to jointly build a high-speed railway line between Astana in the north and Almaty in the south by 2015. The line will run at a speed of up to 350 km/h, providing service to 5 million passengers every year and reducing what usually is a long trip to a much quicker four-hour travel. China's experience and technology in the field of railway building are attractive to Kazakhstan. China's high-speed railways are already the world's longest and fastest. Beijing now aims to expand its national high-speed railway lines from the current 6,920 km (4,300 miles) to more than 16,000 (9900 miles) by 2020.



(AP)

Perhaps the most intriguing has been the agreement reached to create a Kazakh-Chinese university in Kazakhstan to facilitate technological exchange and innovative education. As Nazarbayev remarked: “Our agreements to create a Chinese-Kazakh supercomputer center in Astana and open a Kazakh-Chinese university to study and implement Chinese innovations in Kazakhstan hold big prospects”.

IMPLICATIONS: Energy cooperation still tops the bilateral relationship, enabling Kazakhstan to diversify its relations with Russia, the U.S., and the EU, which are

coveting the country’s energy resources. In 2005, Nazarbayev stated unequivocally that, “we are again witnessing superpower rivalry for economic dominance in our region. We have to address this new global and geo-economic challenge correctly. We have a choice between remaining the supplier of raw materials to global markets and wait patiently for the emergence of the next imperial master or to pursue genuine economic integration of the Central Asian region. I choose the latter”. This logic has been driving Kazakhstan’s multi-vector foreign policy as the country has sought expanded collaboration with various actors in

diverse fields of energy, trade, transport, and even education.

Remarkably, it is no longer only the Chinese state-owned energy companies but also private firms that have started penetrating the Kazakh energy market. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan and China are building a new pipeline to deliver gas from the Urikhtau deposit to China. Beijing's energy cooperation with Central Asian states has already undermined a Russian near-monopoly on the region's energy exports. In 2006, China and Kazakhstan launched a 2,200 km-long (1,350 miles) oil pipeline connecting the two countries. Three years later, they opened another pipeline to deliver gas to China bypassing Russia. This pipeline is part of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-China pipeline project, which aims to provide China with 40 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas annually by 2013 – a decent amount given China's current annual gas needs of about 100 bcm.

But trade, transport, and education are also emerging as strong pillars of cooperation between Astana and Beijing. In 2008 the trade between them constituted more than two-thirds of the total trade between China and Central Asia. Kazakh-Chinese trade, in turn, grew from US\$ 300 million in the first year of Kazakhstan's independence to more than US\$ 20 billion in 2010, although Kazakhstan's resources currently make up about two thirds of the joint trade. Kazakhstan clearly seeks to position itself as a transit hub in Eurasia, linking markets in Europe, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Recently, Astana has obtained a US\$ 2 billion loan from the EBRD for the planned US\$ 5.32 billion Western Europe – Western China transport corridor scheme. But Kazakhstan first needs to become a similar hub

from within. Hence the push by its authorities to develop domestic transport infrastructure, including through external deals, like the one with China to jointly construct a high-speed railway line connecting the country's north and south. This is geopolitically significant for yet another reason. For the first time in Kazakhstan's young history of independence, it is Chinese technologies and resources, not American or Russian ones, which will be used to build the railway line across the country.

A similar balancing strategy is attempted in the sphere of education, on which the Kazakh leadership has relied to enter the club of the world's 50 most competitive economies. It is already home to Russian, American, and Turkish universities, and is now also looking to benefit from the Chinese experience in the effort to build a more hi-tech and innovative economy.

CONCLUSIONS: The pace of economic development displayed by these two neighboring countries predictably suggests their multi-faceted cooperation will grow even stronger with time. In this light, Nazarbayev's recent visit to China and the reached agreements provide a good starting point for more active collaboration not only in the trade and energy field, but also transport and education, among other areas. A more comprehensive bilateral cooperation could add a further balance to Kazakhstan's domestic economy and its external engagements with the rest of the world.

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ARMENIA'S RULING COALITION DEEPENS COOPERATION

Haroutiun Khachatryan

The three-party government coalition of Armenia has adopted a rather unexpected document whereby its member parties express their support for the nomination of current President Serzh Sargsyan two years before his expected reelection bid. They also declare their intention to help each other during the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2012. This can be regarded as very strong support for Sargsyan and his team, which they will certainly need. Considering the considerable political power of the coalition, the declaration promises to maintain its rule well beyond the upcoming elections.

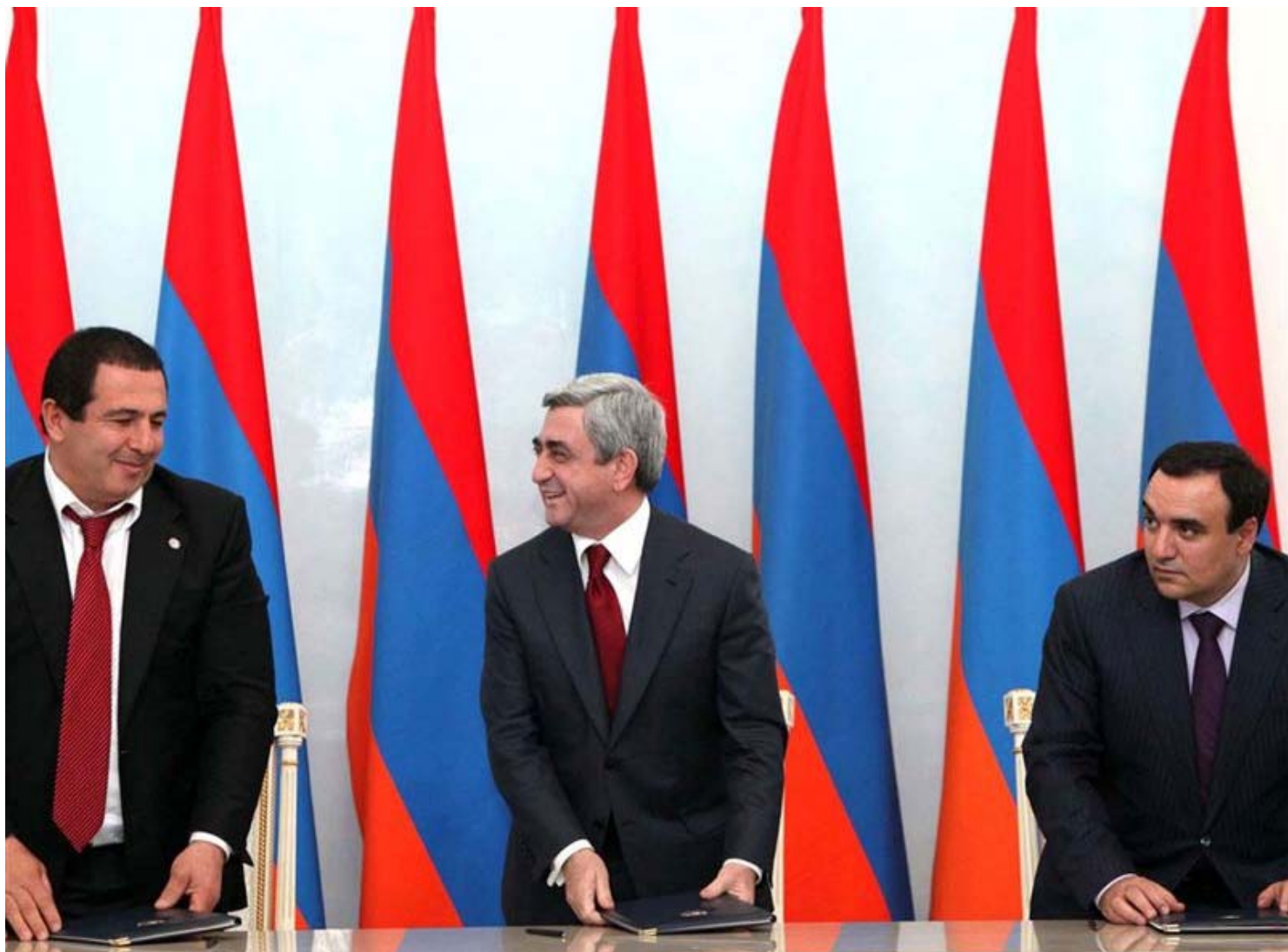
BACKGROUND: On February 17, the three political parties of Armenia's governing coalition signed a declaration according to which they will continue cooperating after their current government expires, i.e., the general elections in 2012. The document reads: "The parties of the Coalition ... in the upcoming parliamentary elections will not strive to increase their political weight through contesting against each other or changing the correlation of forces within the Coalition". This is in fact equivalent to forming a joint list of candidates of these parties for the elections.

Moreover, the three parties undertook the obligation to jointly support the candidacy of Sargsyan during the presidential elections of 2013. The Declaration states that "at the presidential elections the Political Coalition will come up with one single nomination in the person of the current President, thus creating guarantees of further continuity in the changes and sustainable development of our country for the next five years". The governing coalition currently contains three parties; Sargsyan's Republican Party of Armenia (RPA, with 63 mandates in the National Assembly), Bargavach Hayastan (Prosperous Armenia or PA with 26 mandates), and Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law or CL with 8 mandates). The

coalition controls at least another three mandates beyond their factions. Hence, the coalition controls a total of 100 of the 131 mandates in the National Assembly.

The adoption of this declaration was rather unexpected, since it came soon after the February 12 Congress of the Prosperous Armenia party, during and after which no word was said about the possibility of its cooperation with the RPA after 2012. Moreover, PA leader Gagik Tsarukian announced during the Congress that that his party would demand the ruling RPA to protect the norms of democracy during the elections of 2012. This would seem to imply that the PA party was prepared to struggle actively in those elections. Immediately after the signing ceremony, Gagik Tsarukian told reporters that his party signed the declaration because the country "faces a number of social, political and military challenges".

IMPLICATIONS: The signing of this declaration holds heavy political significance. First, it showed that the RPA is strong enough to force the PA party, the second largest party of the coalition, to follow the RPA's policies. Second, it implies that the current political coalition will seek to maintain the existing status quo beyond the parliamentary elections



(Photolur)

of 2012, and that the next parliament will have roughly the same pattern of ruling factions and the same ratio of mandates as now, while the opposition may be different. It can be predicted that the RPA will take advantage of the administrative resources it possesses during the elections of 2012 and 2013.

Third, President Sargsyan and his team have secured more freedom for their actions against their political opponents, in particular against the movement led by Armenia's first President Levon Ter-Petrosian. Fourth, Sargsyan and his team have obtained a *carte blanche* for their

actions in the social sphere until 2018. The current government has initiated a number of programs whose implementation is scheduled for a period reaching as far as 2018 and even 2020. These programs include the creation of a European-style quality infrastructure as a means to access the European market; the formation of an e-society based on high-speed Internet; and the creation of several Free Economic Zones as vehicles to ensure rapid development of the country in the post-crisis period. The government will now be able to continue implementing such programs after the presidential elections of 2013. Finally, the ruling

coalition and Sargsyan himself have also secured more freedom for their foreign policy, including policies related to Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian-Turkish relations.

Thus, the Declaration signed on February 17 first of all provides additional leverage to the RPA and Sargsyan as it provides additional legitimacy to its actions in the currently tense situation in the country, where a wave of discontent is rising due to the continuing world economic crisis, exacerbated by rising food prices. In conditions where opposition factions seek to exploit the public discontent and in the light of events in the Middle East, the additional support of the coalition parties for the RPA is much needed.

The declaration's signatories are careful to pledge that they will combat the causes of these problems. In particular, the declaration states that "the Political Coalition declares its resolve to take more courageous steps toward ensuring Armenia's post-crisis progressive development and the improvement of the well-being of our people, placing special emphasis on comprehensive fight against corruption and significant reduction of the shadow economy".

The declaration is especially beneficial to the smallest party of the coalition, the CL party. During the presidential elections of 2008 this party was in opposition and its leader Arthur Baghdasarian was the third in that race. However, it later joined the coalition and Baghdasarian has become Secretary of the President's Security Council. For these reasons, this party has lost its popularity and, according to current estimates, could fail to enter the next parliament without external assistance. The declaration pledges such assistance to the CL party.

The position of the PA party is less obvious. Its leader Tsarukian is not a politician, but a businessman, and the RPA leadership has reportedly made great efforts and even used blackmailing to persuade the leadership of PA to join the February 17 document. The PA party was initially expected to participate separately in the coming two elections, thus breaking the political monopoly of the RPA. Moreover, it was expected to support Robert Kocharian, Armenia's second President and a possible rival to Serzh Sagsyan, during the elections of 2013. The February 17 document annulled these expectations and there is no clarity over how this result was achieved.

CONCLUSIONS: The members of the three-party government coalition of Armenia which is led by the RPA have signed a declaration in which these parties confirmed that their coalition is stable and expressed readiness to continue their cooperation during and after the next general elections of 2012 and the presidential elections of 2013. In particular, they agreed to support Sargsyan in his re-election bid in 2013. Thus, the two smaller parties of the coalition, Prosperous Armenia and Country of Law, have agreed to follow the RPA rather than to act as independent players at least before 2018. As the coalition currently enjoys overwhelming power in Armenia, there is little doubt that it will indeed survive the upcoming elections and will have more freedom in implementing its plans both at home and in foreign affairs.

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FIELD REPORTS

VIDEO RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT A TAJIK FIGHTER'S DEATH

Alexander Sodiqov

Less than two months after reporting that militant commander Alovuddin Davlatov (more commonly known as Ali Bedaki or Bedak) was killed in battle, Tajik security agencies are confronted with a video that allegedly undermines the official account of the rebel's death. The four-minute mobile phone video circulating in Tajikistan and posted on YouTube shows uniformed men, supposedly members of Tajik law enforcement agencies, questioning a bearded man whom they address as Ali Bedaki. The latter sits half-naked in the back seat of a car, with a gun pointed at him, and appears very humiliated.

An interrogator in combat fatigue questions Ali Bedaki about the assault on a government military convoy in the Kamarob gorge in Rasht valley which occurred on September 19, 2010. The assault left 28 soldiers dead and many wounded, becoming the deadliest attack on government forces since the end of the civil war in the country. The Tajik defense ministry and law enforcement agencies blamed the attack on Ali Bedaki and Abdullo Rahimov (aka Mullo Abdullo), who had been prominent Islamic opposition commanders in the 1990s. The day after the assault, state-run television channels aired a "confession" of a detained Islamic Revival Party (IRPT) activist, asserting that his brother, Ali Bedaki, was behind the attack. The televised confession also included claims that Bedaki headed a "terrorist group" of about 100 militants, including foreign mercenaries, created a "terrorist camp" and was producing improvised explosive devices (IEDs) for terrorist attacks in Tajikistan.

Three days after the assault, government forces launched a massive security operation in the Rasht

valley, which used to be an Islamic opposition stronghold during the civil war, reportedly to capture Bedaki and Mullo Abdullo. About three months later, on January 4, 2011, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) reported that Bedaki and eight of his fighters had been killed by Tajik security forces in the village of Runob, less than a kilometer from Rasht. According to the official explanation, the militants were killed after being spotted by a police patrol and refusing to surrender. One militant was reportedly captured alive. However, video footage and photographs taken by security forces show only seven bodies, according to Tajik journalists. Security agencies have so far refused to return the militants' bodies to their relatives for burial, claiming that the national legislation prohibits handing terrorists' bodies to relatives. Independent lawyers assert that the claims are false and such legislation does not exist.

The video appears to undermine the government's description of Bedaki's killing. Spokespersons for the MIA and State Committee for National Security (GKNB) said they saw the video, but refused to comment on it. Meanwhile, residents of the Rasht valley and former opposition fighters confirmed that the man in the video was definitely Bedaki. Opposition activists say the video proves that security agencies are not truthful in suggesting that Bedaki was killed in battle.

The authenticity of the video is also confirmed by other details. The interrogator in the video tells Bedaki that he knows about a surgery on his fingers and asks whether the surgery was performed by doctor named Vazirov. On February 17, the MIA

spokesperson announced that two doctors from the Rasht central hospital, Abdullo Vazirov and Muhammadkholik Sodiqov, had been detained and charged with connections to Bedaki's "criminal group". According to media reports, the doctors were arrested for treating Bedaki and his fighters for gunshot wounds and failing to inform Tajik security agencies that they had done so.

Meanwhile, the MIA also arrested Bedaki's 76-year-old father, Muzaffar Davlatov, charging him with "cooperating with illegal groups, arms possession, and unwillingness to inform the law-enforcement agencies of his son's plans and activities". The

property and farm that belonged to Bedaki's family in Rasht have been confiscated.

The contentious account of Bedaki's death bears a strong resemblance to a controversial explanation offered by Tajik authorities after the July 2009 killing of another prominent civil war-era militant commander, Mirzo Ziyoev. (See August 19, 2009, CACI Analyst) Major discrepancies emerged in the official account of Ziyoev's death. It is most likely that just as it did after Ziyoev's death, the government will now also choose to completely ignore the difficult questions posed by the Bedaki video.

TURKISH PRIME MINISTER VISITS KYRGYZSTAN

Joldosh Osmonov

The Turkish Prime Minister paid an official visit to Kyrgyzstan to demonstrate his political and economic support as the country faces hardships after last year's government change. Many experts believe that the visit opens a new page in the relationship between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey and provides a special place for Turkey in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy. However, others contend that Turkish active economic involvement in Kyrgyzstan may not coincide with Russian interests, and may thus lead to cooler relations between Bishkek and Moscow.

On February 1-2, a Turkish official delegation led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Kyrgyzstan. During the two-day visit, the Turkish leader met with his Kyrgyz counterpart Almazbek Atambaev and President Roza Otunbaeva. He also addressed the newly elected national parliament. Prime Minister Erdogan became the first foreign leader to visit the country since the change of government in April 2010. The two sides signed a number of agreements aimed at fostering bilateral economic cooperation.

Showing its commitment to open a new page in Kyrgyz-Turkish relations, the Turkish government

promised immediate financial support as Kyrgyzstan struggles with huge budget deficit and an economic downturn. The Turkish side has already transferred US\$ 10 million to reduce Kyrgyzstan's budget deficit and promised more assistance in the coming months, the Kyrgyz Prime Minister stated at the official joint press conference in Bishkek on February 2. Moreover, the Turkish leadership will encourage US\$ 450 million in investments into the Kyrgyz economy in the nearest future, Atambaev added. As Erdogan noted, one-third of the expected investments will be directed to educational projects, particularly to modernization and development of the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University in Bishkek into the leading academic center in Central Asia.

An additional US\$ 15 million will be allocated for reconstruction works in southern Kyrgyzstan after the ethnic clashes last year, Erdogan announced during his meeting with President Otunbaeva. In her turn, Otunbaeva awarded the Turkish leader with the Danaker special medal, emphasizing the Prime Minister's role in the post-conflict stabilization process. "During last year's tragic events in southern Kyrgyzstan when inter-ethnic

conflict erupted, we felt the support of Turkey”, Otunbaeva said at the meeting.

With an aim to foster Turkish investments into the country, Bishkek and Ankara established an Interstate Council headed by the two Prime Ministers. The first session of the council is planned to be held in Turkey in March 2011, as Atambaev will pay a return visit to Ankara.

Talking about the new political system in the country, the Turkish leader praised the country’s choice to build parliamentary democracy. Addressing the national parliament, he stated that “in choosing a parliamentary system of government, Kyrgyzstan chose a new model of development that will ensure peace, stability and prosperity”. Erdogan assured that Turkey will decisively support the country’s attempts to conduct wide political reforms.

Moreover, the two leaders also agreed to introduce a visa-free regime between the countries. In a first stage, citizens of the two countries can stay in the respective states for up to three months with no visa required, but at the end of this year the visa system will be fully abolished, the Turkish Prime Minister stated at the press conference. Currently, Kyrgyz citizens do not need a visa if they stay in Turkey for less than a month. The Turkish leadership also promised to enlarge the quota for Kyrgyz students at Turkish universities.

The Turkish Prime Minister also spoke at a business forum calling upon the 300 attending Turkish and Kyrgyz businessmen to invest into the Kyrgyz economy. At the same time, he urged the Kyrgyz side to create an “atmosphere of trust” by fighting corruption and ensuring political stability. Later, in an interview with a local newspaper, Erdogan named energy, the mineral resources industry, transportation and communications as spheres of interest for Turkish investments.

Meanwhile, local media outlets repeatedly reported that the Turkish side aimed to invest in particular strategic objects in Kyrgyzstan such as the state-owned oil-distributing company KyrgyzNeftegas,

the Manas international airport in Bishkek and the Dastan military factory which produces submarine missiles for the Russian navy. The factory is partially (48 percent) owned by Russia. As the local experts contend, the possibility of Turkey buying shares in the factory will raise concerns in the Kremlin.

Moreover, one day before Erdogan’s visit, the state-owned Turkish Petroleum International Company (TPIC) announced that it is negotiating with the Kyrgyz government on supplying jet fuel for the U.S. Transit Center at Manas airport in Bishkek. The Russian oil giant Gazprom is also interested in fuel supply for the airbase.

Local analysts believe that the Turkish intrusion into the so called “spheres of Russian interests” will seriously irritate Moscow and may aggravate the relationship between Russia and Kyrgyzstan. However, as the Kyrgyz Prime Minister stated at the press conference, Kyrgyzstan considers Russia as a strategic partner and will continue to adhere to all agreements with Moscow. The Turkish leadership understands this, and Erdogan therefore called for three-sided Kyrgyz-Turkish-Russian negotiations to discuss the investment possibilities into strategic spheres of the Kyrgyz economy, Atambaev concluded.



AZERBAIJAN SEEKS TO CURB RAMPANT CORRUPTION

Mina Muradova

Several officials on all levels of government have been fired and hundreds of state employees have been subjected to administrative charges since Azerbaijan's authorities commenced an anticorruption campaign a month ago. While ministries are competing over which one has punished the largest number of employees for abuse of authority, ordinary people are discussing how far the anticorruption campaign will go.

On January 27, the head of the presidential administration Ramiz Mehdiyev chaired a meeting of the national Commission on Combating Corruption and promised that offenders would be penalized.

Referring to President Ilham Aliyev's "vision", Mehdiyev told the heads of governmental agencies attending the meeting that "combating bribe-taking and corruption in the country must not be formal and must be a priority of governmental bodies". President Aliyev himself cleaned up among senior officials by firing the chairman of the water supply company, as well as heads of local administrations in the country.

Afterwards, ministries and committees dismissed a number of employees on corruption charges. The Health Ministry's web site reported that some 21 heads of hospitals, maternity hospitals, and hygienic and epidemiological centers had been sacked, while an additional 54 senior officials had been subjected to disciplinary punishments and warnings for shortcomings in organizing public medical services. The Justice Ministry fired the head of the Penitentiary Service responsible for order in jails, while six judges lost their seats.

Four deans and heads of departments have been dismissed from Azerbaijan's top university. Dozens of directors of kindergartens throughout the country were dismissed for "failings in their work", according to the Ministry of Education. Criminal charges have been brought against six Transport

Ministry employees for abusing authority, and nine road police employees were sacked.

According to international reports, corruption is rampant in Azerbaijan. In 2010, the global anticorruption watchdog Transparency International ranked Azerbaijan as 134 of 178 countries on its Corruption Perceptions Index, behind Armenia at 123 and Georgia at 68. The 2010 Global Corruption Barometer examined bribery involved in people's contact with customs, education, the judiciary, land related services, medical services, the police, registry and permit services, tax authorities, and utilities. It found that 47 percent of Azerbaijani respondents paid a bribe to any of the nine service providers. According to the survey, over 50 percent of the respondents thought that corruption had increased in 2010 and that the most corrupt sector was the police, followed by the educational institutions and the judiciary.

Experts believe that bribery is not only a legal issue in Azerbaijan, but also a social problem. The general public does not perceive corruption to be as widespread as the experts assess due to a tradition of gifting (thanking) someone in exchange for a service. This tradition is considered literally as a sign of respect ("hörmet" in the Azerbaijani language).

The U.S. State Department stated in its 2010 Investment Climate Statement regarding Azerbaijan that "...The poor quality, reliability, and transparency of governance, as well as regulatory abuse and poor contract enforcement, significantly impede the ability of many companies to do business. Politically connected business interests benefit from their control of lucrative sectors...". The same report pointed out that people identified "the State Customs Committee as the institution of greatest concern to businesses in Azerbaijan, followed by the Ministry of Taxation ... and corruption appears most pervasive in the regulatory, tax and dispute settlement systems".

While Azerbaijan's government conducts its anticorruption campaign, a trial against the Swiss freight company Panalpina has just revealed that the company was allegedly paying bribes to Azerbaijani officials in past years. Radio Liberty reported that according to U.S. investigators, Panalpina's branch in Azerbaijan has allegedly paid US\$ 900,000 in bribes to the country's customs officials during 2002-2007. The bribes were paid to expedite imports of goods, avoid customs duties on imported goods, and lower tax assessments. The Justice Department's documents claim that Azerbaijani officials have received bribes to overlook incomplete and inaccurate documentation.

Another company, Tidewater Marine, admitted that it had paid bribes to Azerbaijani tax inspectors in 2001-2005. The New Orleans-based company, which operates offshore service and supply vessels for energy exploration, is charged with paying US\$ 160,000 in bribes. Tidewater is said to have saved US\$ 820,000 in taxes. However, Azerbaijani officials have been silent on these bribe cases.

International watchdog organizations note that Azerbaijan has made little progress in actually combating corruption, despite the adoption of relevant legislation and national anticorruption measures. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani officials claim that the fight against corruption will be permanent. "The anticorruption measures are not just a

campaign, this process will be continued in all spheres", said Fuad Alasgarov, Chief of the Presidential Administration's department for work with law-enforcement organizations, on February 28.

Stressing the President's recent signature of two orders on increasing transparency in the customs and police, Alasgarov said that a "one-stop shop" system would be applied on the customs points. "Those who bring cars to Azerbaijan from abroad will carry out such procedures as registration of the car and its identification number according to the single window principle. All these procedures will be implemented by means of bank cards. An electronic system will also be implemented". One car importer said that depending on the car's model, its capacity and age, the unofficial fee varies between US\$ 500 and US\$ 2,000.

In order to inform the population about tariffs and other official fees, the national anticorruption commission launched the website www.rusum.az in mid-February, presenting information from utilities calculation to custom tariffs and taxes.

However, many respondents speaking off the record are unconvinced about the efficiency of these measures. One importer said that "even after all these statements, we continue paying extra fees to customs officers as before, nothing has changed".

U.S. ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE ROBERT BLAKE VISITS UZBEKISTAN

Erkin Akhmadov

An American delegation headed by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake arrived in Uzbekistan on February 17-18 to take part in annual bilateral consultations on political and economic issues. On February 18, representatives of ten leading American companies led by the head of the American-Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce and Uzbek officials participated in a business forum.

The agenda of the consultations included bilateral cooperation in the political, trade-economic, investment, cultural-humanitarian and other spheres. The parties also exchanged opinions on problems of international and regional security of common interest. Blake summarized the results of the consultations at the press conference that took place at the U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan.

The first round of political consultations between the U.S. and Uzbekistan took place in December 2009 in Washington, DC. As a result of the meeting Uzbekistan approved an action plan for bilateral cooperation in the political and economic spheres, along with security, human resources, and supporting peace and stability in Afghanistan. Furthermore, several projects are implemented within the trade-economic and fuel and energy sectors.

In the second round of consultations, Blake noted that the main goal of the current visit, specifically regarding business cooperation, was to negotiate conditions acceptable to U.S. businessmen, rather than realizing specific projects.

During the Uzbek-American forum the Assistant Secretary stated that the U.S. intends to increase the volume of Uzbek goods for American troops in Afghanistan. According to him, the U.S. side has already purchased "items for more than US\$ 5 million in October 2010" and considers the possibility of further expanding this cooperation. Meanwhile, serious discussions over Uzbekistan becoming the main food supplier for NATO in Afghanistan continue. Currently, this role is performed by the United Arab Emirates.

It should be noted that in 2010 the trade turnover between Uzbekistan and the U.S. constituted US\$ 181 million. As Blake noted, the U.S. Government will work with the American-Uzbekistan Chamber of Commerce in developing proposals for practical steps to improve the business climate in Uzbekistan. The President of Uzbekistan in turn expressed confidence that the Chamber of Commerce as such "will become an important instrument for expanding trade-economic and investment cooperation between the two countries".

Perhaps as a result of these intentions, major American companies such as Honeywell, Boeing, Exxon Mobile, Zeppelin International, Caterpillar and Nukem that participated in the forum reached

agreements on mobilizing U.S. technology and investments in several spheres of the Uzbek economy, such as oil and gas, chemical, petrochemical, and mechanical engineering, the electro-technical industry, the production of construction materials and others. For instance, on February 21 the leadership of the Uzbek national holding company Uzbekneftegas met with representatives of Zeppelin and agreed to establish technical cooperation. In addition, representatives of General Electric Energy stated that it plans to take part in realizing projects to modernize the Tashkent and Talimarjan thermal power plants in Uzbekistan.

Speaking of the results of the political and economic consultations, Blake noted that the parties reached a number of agreements, specifically on the expansion of educational exchanges, cooperation between the U.S. Congress and Uzbekistan's Parliament, and intensified consultations on Afghanistan. Thus, he stated that the major priorities of the U.S. include expanding the U.S. presence in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries.

In sum, the second round of the consultations can be considered a success, having reached a number of agreements in the political and economic spheres. In terms of U.S. political interests in Uzbekistan, the consultations brought about intensified cooperation on issues related to Afghanistan.

However, while several leading U.S. companies held negotiations with their Uzbek counterparts for further cooperation, it is telling that the Assistant Secretary emphasized that the main goal of the visit was to establish positive conditions for U.S. businessmen in Uzbekistan, i.e. not to make actual investments in the Uzbek economy. Thus, even though numerous praises to the "successfully developing" Uzbek economy were voiced during the meeting, it seems that U.S. businessmen are still hesitant to make actual investments in the country.

NEWS DIGEST

AZERI OIL HEADS THROUGH UKRAINIAN PIPELINE

16 February

The Odessa-Brody pipeline through Ukraine started carrying crude oil from Azerbaijan to Belarus, the state oil shipping company announced. Azeri and Ukrainian officials met on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in early February to discuss energy issues in Europe. Kiev is trying to shore up its reputation as a transit hub for oil and natural gas while Azerbaijan moves to become a regional leader in energy as new reserves come on stream. The 419-mile pipeline had been operated toward Russia following supply concerns. Russian oil is delivered to the Odessa-Brody pipeline from a junction of the Druzhba pipeline, the longest in the world. Ukraine's oil-shipping monopoly UkrTransNafta said shipments of Azeri crude oil through the pipeline enhances the energy security for Ukraine and "the region and Europe as a whole," the company was quoted by the Platts news service as saying. Sofia in January signed a deal with Azerbaijan to import 80,000 barrels of oil per day. The Ukrainian pipeline company noted that it would continue "reliable and uninterrupted transit of Russian oil" toward Eastern Europe. Odessa-Brody can carry as much as 87 million barrels of oil per year. (UPI)

UZBEKS SENTENCED FOR MEMBERSHIP IN ALLEGED JIHADIST GROUP

17 February

Thirteen people have been sentenced by an Uzbek regional court to between 6 and 10 years in prison for their alleged membership in an Islamic group called Jihadists, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reports. The only registered human rights organization in Uzbekistan, Ezgulik (Goodness), said the men were found guilty by the court in the southern province of Qashqadaryo of "encroachment on the constitutional order" and "dissemination of materials harmful to public safety and order." Uzbek prosecutors frequently bring those specific

charges against Islamic dissidents. The trial was held behind closed doors. The verdict was pronounced on February 3, but made public only on February 14 after relatives of the defendants appealed to Ezgulik to seek information about the accused. Ezgulik said the verdict reads: "the accused men were poisoned by the idea of an Islamic state and launched a series of crimes against the constitutional order and public security and morality." All reportedly plead guilty to the charges. Ezgulik said several of the sentenced men are farmers. One was an imam. There have been several trials in various regions of Uzbekistan involving purported members of the Jihadists group. In most of the cases, the defendants were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. Those jailed on such charges include popular soccer commentator Khayrulla Hamidov, who is also the author of a series of popular radio programs on being Muslim. He was sentenced last year to six years in prison. Uzbek human rights groups say several dozen more people are awaiting trial on similar charges. At least 21 of them are from Qashqadaryo. Local and international rights groups estimate that more than 10,000 practicing Muslims in Uzbekistan are currently serving long prison sentences, mostly on charges of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and install a theocracy. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN ENDS NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES FOR EARLY PRESIDENT POLLS

21 February

The nomination of candidates to run in the early presidential elections in Kazakhstan is over. Incumbent Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev set the elections on April 3. Some 22 presidential candidates were nominated by the evening on February 20, the Kazakh Central Election Commission reported. Three political parties nominated their candidates, namely Nur Otan – incumbent President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the Communist People's Party of

Kazakhstan – Zhambyl Akhmetbekov, the Kazakh Party of Patriots – Gani Kasymov and the republican people's patriotic movement Zheltoksan (December) – Kurmangazy Rakhmetov. Other candidates are self-nominees. Five hopefuls did not pass the Kazakh language exam, the Kazakh CEC reported. Four of them were already denied registration. Another two self-nominees dropped from the presidential race. The only officially registered presidential candidate is incumbent Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev. The registration of presidential candidates continues and will end on March 2. Apart from passing the Kazakh language exam for official registration a presidential candidate is to deposit about 800,000 tenges (about 5,000 dollars) to the CEC account and to file an income and property declaration in the tax service. Under the resolution, which the CEC has earlier issued, at least 91,000 voters equally representing all 16 regions of the country are to sign up for a presidential candidate. The canvassing campaign will be launched on March 3 and will end on April 1 that is two days before the election day. (Itar-Tass)

UZBEKISTAN WARNS OVER “EVIL, SATANIC” ROCK MUSIC

22 February

Uzbekistan's state television Monday issued an unequivocal denunciation of rock and rap as a Western liberal excess, saying the music is epitomised by sadism, drug addiction and immorality. In a TV documentary called "Melody and Calamity" Uzbekistan's second main channel Youht TV raised alarm over "pernicious influence of Western rock and rap music approaching as dark clouds over the heads of Uzbek youth". Uzbekistan is Central Asia's most populous country, where 90 percent of the 28 million inhabitants are Muslim. The secular government, wary of both religious extremist ideology and "excesses of Western democracy", has in recent months shown increasing impatience with cultural imports from abroad. The documentary, made in the style of a Soviet propaganda film, said "rock music originated from African hunting rituals" and "rap was originated by inmates in prisons, that's why rap singers wear wide and long trousers". "This satanic music was created by evil forces to bring youth in Western countries to total moral degradation," according to the documentary. Some of the Uzbek singers interviewed lambasted Western style pop and heavy music and said that the salvation from their hazardous effects was to be found in Uzbek classical

music. "If you check disks or flashcards in your home you may find some of the rock or rap songs performed by Uzbek singers as well... and be aware of the satanic effects of this evil music," the narrator warned. The documentary also mentioned scientific research studying the effects of the music on human health, saying that if classical music was a cure from illnesses, rock and rap are the tickets to death. The film repeatedly showed footage of Western singers in concerts, an encroaching scorpion and ended with nuclear bomb blast in the background and asked if "we can take measures against the dark clouds". The broadcast of the documentary comes after Uzbekistan withdrew approval for the broadcast of two Russian television channels, reportedly due to the high sexual content in some of their shows. (AFP)

GEORGIAN CORPORAL KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

22 February

The Georgian Defense Ministry reported on Tuesday that one Georgian serviceman had been killed and two others injured in Afghanistan. Corporal Giorgi Avaliani, who served in the 32nd Battalion stationed in the Afghan province of Helmand, was killed when he stepped on a landmine, it said. Two other corporals, Nikoloz Deisadze and Ednard Abuladze, had been injured and hospitalized. This is not the first instance of a Georgian serviceman's death in Afghanistan. The Georgian parliament planned on Tuesday to endorse the sending of eleven Georgian instructors to Afghanistan to train Afghan artillery soldiers. About 1,000 Georgian servicemen are currently deployed in Afghanistan. (Interfax)

NABUCCO SAYS BP COST ESTIMATES A GUESS

22 February

An assessment by BP that commodity prices are pushing the cost of the Nabucco natural gas pipeline higher is only a guess, the consortium declared. Europe aims to diversify its energy sector through the Nabucco gas pipeline. The project could draw much of its gas from Azerbaijan and potential suppliers in the Middle East in an effort to break the Russian grip on the regional energy sector. The Nabucco consortium managing the pipeline from Vienna estimates the 2,000-mile pipeline will cost around \$10.7 billion to build. The Guardian newspaper in London, however, said it discovered that estimates from British energy company BP put

the bill at around \$19 billion. A Nabucco spokesman told United Press International that its cost estimates were based on its own feasibility studies. "These BP figures are pure speculations," said Christian Dolezal. "We are currently evaluating the costs and after we have all necessary results of the detailed engineering we are going public." The European government reached a recent agreement with Baku for Azeri gas to meet some of Nabucco's capacity, which project leaders said was a positive sign. The project is struggling against supply and pricing concerns, though Dolezal suggested all was well. "Nabucco's focus is clearly to bring new gas to Europe from the Caspian region and the Middle East," he said. "But our pipeline will be open for third party access as also European energy law wants it." (UPI)

KAZAKH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE DENIED REGISTRATION FOR NOT TURNING UP FOR LANGUAGE TEST

23 February

The Central Election Committee (CEC) of Kazakhstan has refused to register Meiramkul Kozhagulova from Aktyubinsk as presidential candidate, an Interfax correspondent reports. CEC made the decision at its Wednesday meeting in Astana. "Considering her failure to attend a session of the language commission her compliance with the requirement of the free command of the Kazakh language was not established," CEC secretary Bakyt Meldeshov said. Ms. Kozhugalova, 49, filed her application for registration to CEC last Friday. Full command of the national language is a mandatory condition for a presidential candidate in Kazakhstan. All candidates must pass a language test to comply with the requirement. Presidential elections in Kazakhstan are slated for April 3. (Interfax)

CNPC INKS NEW O&G DEAL WITH KAZAKHSTAN

23 February

China National Petroleum Corp. and Kazakhstan national oil and gas company KazMunaiGas signed a new oil and gas cooperation agreement Tuesday during the Kazakhstan president's state visit to China, said CNPC. The move marks the latest effort by China to tap natural gas resources from Kazakhstan, CNPC's main oil and gas production base in Central Asia, to meet robust domestic demand for the cleaner-burning fuel. China has been by far the biggest foreign investor in

Kazakhstan's oil and gas industry over the last few years. The two companies will establish an equally-held joint venture to explore and develop the Urikhtau gas field in Kazakhstan, with gas produced at the field to be transported via the China-Kazakhstan natural gas pipeline, CNPC said in its inhouse newsletter. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev arrived in Beijing Monday for a three-day state visit. CNPC and KazMunaiGas in December began construction on the second phase of the China-Kazakhstan pipeline project, which will link western Kazakhstan with the Central Asia Gas Pipeline. The 1,475-kilometer pipeline in Kazakhstan will have annual transmission capacity of 10 billion cubic meters, which could be expanded to 15 billion cubic meters. By Feb. 15, China had received 5.8 billion cubic meters of gas via the Central Asia Gas Pipeline, which ultimately connects to Turkmenistan, CNPC has said. CNPC has also said that its oil and gas production in Kazakhstan reached a record 30 million metric tons of oil equivalent last year and that it plans to double the transmission capacity of the crude-oil pipeline linking the two countries to 20 million metric tons a year, or 401,600 barrels a day, by 2013. (Dow Jones Newswires)

JAIL TERMS CUT FOR SLAIN TAJIK MINISTER'S RELATIVES

25 February

Prison terms have been reduced for 29 relatives and supporters of a slain government minister who were sentenced over an alleged antigovernment plot, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. She added that Ziyoev's brother, Abdusamad Ziyoev, and Muhsiddin Muhiddinov, were released from jail. Some 50 relatives and associates of Mirzo Ziyoev were detained during a crackdown in the eastern Tavil-Dara district between May and December 2009. Eleven of them are Russian citizens. The Tajik Supreme Court sentenced two of them to life imprisonment, two to 23-30 year terms, and the rest to sentences ranging from 10 to 27 years. Ziyoev's eldest son, Sayed Akhmad Ziyoev, was sentenced to 30 years in prison, and his younger son, Muhammad Reza, to 28 years. Mirzo Ziyoev was the United Tajik Opposition's top military commander during the 1992-97 civil war. Upon the end of the war he was named emergency situations minister. Officials said Ziyoev was killed in an ambush by his own supporters during an antidrug operation in Tavil-Dara in July 2009. His supporters deny any responsibility in his death. The government later

accused him and his supporters of drug trafficking and supporting the banned Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The authorities have also released two former opposition commanders who were sentenced earlier for other crimes. An RFE/RL correspondent reports that Fathullo Khayriddinov (aka Eshoni Daroz), the former opposition commander in the Vahdat district, about 20 kilometers east of Dushanbe, was released from jail. Khayriddinov was ordered to perform unpaid corrective labor and report to police every week. He also may not leave the district, Khayriddinov's father said. A second Ziyoev associate, Nazar Yormuhammadov, has also been released from jail on the condition he does not leave his home. (RFE/RL)

TURKMENISTAN RESTRICTS SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

26 February

Turkmen authorities have tightened their control over Turkmenistan's secondary schools and universities in the past week, RFE/RL's Turkmen Service reports. Secondary school teachers are now required to be at work from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. each school day regardless of their class hours. University students are not to leave the university premises before 6 p.m. Those who live in dormitories must be in bed before 11 p.m. and are not permitted to do their homework after that time. No reason for the new measures was given. It is unclear whether they are political, possibly in response to the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, or intended to prevent the repetition of a violent incident earlier this month at the Ashgabat Polytechnical Institute. A female student from the institute was killed and a second injured after a party involving three male and three female students. Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov sacked the deputy prime minister responsible for science and education along with several senior members of the institute's staff after the incident. Meanwhile, two pop singers, one of whom is a university student, were arrested after their Western-style video was played on the Turkish music TV channel TBM. Maksat Kakabaev and Murat Owezov were first summoned by the Culture and Broadcasting Ministry and warned not to appear again in foreign media. But they were later detained by national security officials. It is not clear what charges, if any, have been brought against them. Kakabaev is in the Yashlyk detention center, 40 kilometers east of Ashgabat. He has reportedly been beaten. Owezov has been exiled to the

Hanghouz district of Mary Province. Students at Turkmen colleges and universities are not allowed to appear in foreign media, leave the country on vacation, drive a car, or use mobile phones on university premises. (RFE/RL)

TAJIK PRESIDENT'S SON TO HEAD CUSTOMS SERVICE DEPARTMENT

28 February

The eldest son of Tajik President Emomali Rahmon was named to a senior position within the State Customs Service, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports. A Tajik Customs Committee official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told RFE/RL that Rustam Emomali was appointed to head the committee's department to combat illegal activities after incumbent Amirkhon Ibdov retired. A Tajik State University graduate, Emomali, who is 23, previously served as an adviser on the State Committee on Investments and State Property. In 2010, he was elected a member of the Dushanbe city council. In 2009, Emomali was elected a deputy in the Union of Tajik Youth, and in December of that year he was elected a member of the Central Committee of the ruling National Democratic Party of Tajikistan. Emomali also plays soccer for Tajikistan's Istiklol club, of which he is a sponsor. He is simultaneously a member of the International Committee of the Olympic Council of Asia and a deputy head of Tajikistan's Football Federation. Rahmon also appointed his daughter, Ozoda Rahmonova, a deputy foreign minister last year. (RFE/RL)

MEDVEDEV PROPOSES NOMINATIONS FOR HEADS OF CHECHNYA, THREE OTHER RUSSIAN REGIONS

28 February

President Dmitry Medvedev has finally decided on the nominations for heads of four Russian regions. Ramzan Kadyrov has been picked as nominee to head the Republic of Chechnya, says a posting on the Kremlin website. And Vladimir Ilyukhin, Sergei Morozov and Rashid Temrezov have been nominated for heads of the Kamchatka Territory, Ulyanovsk Region and the Republic of Karachayev-Cherkessia. (Interfax)

ETHNIC TENSIONS RISING IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN

1 March

Ethnic tensions in southern Kyrgyzstan flared today after police said around 500 people gathered to set

fire to the house of a man they blame for the murder last week of a local tax inspector. Police said they used force to disperse the crowd following the incident in the town of Nookat, in Osh Oblast, and detained 20 people. Demonstrators originally gathered to demand detailed information about the investigation into the murder of an ethnic Kyrgyz man, Sagynbek Alimbaev. Alimbaev was found dead from gunshot wounds in his car on February 23. On February 25, police arrested three suspects from the mainly village of Shark -- which is populated mainly by ethnic Uzbeks -- who reportedly confessed to the killing. Investigators say the last person Alimbaev talked to while alive was a local businessman whose name they gave as Ilhom. Kyrgyz National State Security Committee (UKMK) Deputy Chairman Marat Imankulov said some of the 20 people detained were inebriated and that local police have set up five checkpoints to control the situation in Nookat. Shops and restaurants on the main street have been closed, and some residents have left their homes. In mid-June last year, more than 400 people died and thousands were displaced during violent clashes between local Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the southern Osh and Jalal-Abad regions.

Nookat is 30 kilometers south of Osh. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN TO OFFER KMG EP STAKE IN 'PEOPLE'S IPO'

1 March

Kazakhstan's citizens will be offered the chance to own a 5 percent stake in the listed arm of KazMunaiGas when the state kicks off a "people's IPO" to boost exposure to the stock market, the country's president said. Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is expected to win an election on April 3 and extend his presidency into a third decade, said KazMunaiGas Exploration and Production would sell shares worth a cumulative \$500 million this year. "One person will be able to acquire a maximum of 50 shares," Nazarbayev said during a two-hour briefing with local reporters, which was broadcast on state television early on Tuesday and published on the presidential website, www.akorda.kz. He did not specify the face value of the individual shares. KazMunaiGas E&P, the London-traded unit of state oil and gas giant KazMunaiGas, has a market capitalisation of \$10.4 billion. At current prices, a 5 percent stake in the company would be worth approximately \$522 million. Kazakhstan, the largest economy in Central Asia, plans to launch a series of initial public

offerings this year and next in order to improve liquidity in its stock market and allow some of its 16.4 million people to own shares in its major companies. "This is an event of paramount importance for the state," said Nazarbayev, 70, who was a member of the Soviet Communist Party's last Politburo and has led Kazakhstan since before its independence in 1991. "Only citizens of Kazakhstan will be able to participate," he said. "The whole world is earning money on the stock market and citizens of Kazakhstan should also learn how to do this." State grid company KEGOC, postal firm Kazpost and national rail monopoly Kazakhstan Temir Zholy would be among the next wave of companies to offer shares, said Nazarbayev, who ordered his government last month to prepare the floats. Resource companies would also be candidates for future listings, he said, in a country that mines more uranium than any other and holds slightly more than 3 percent of the world's recoverable oil reserves. He named Glencore-controlled zinc miner Kazzinc and the Temirtau steel plant owned by ArcelorMittal -- where Nazarbayev once worked -- as candidates for domestic IPOs, as well as London-listed ENRC and Kazakhmys. (Reuters)

RUSSIAN REPORTS: "PREMATURE TO POINT FINGER AT GEORGIA OVER DOMODEDOVO ATTACK"

1 March

Russian news agency, Interfax, reported on March 1 quoting an unnamed representative of Russia's National Counter-Terrorism Committee (NAK), that it was premature to blame anyone, including Georgian leadership, for masterminding January terrorist attack at Domodedovo airport in Moscow. "Before the investigation into this case is ongoing, any version about who ordered it or about accomplices can be considered as a personal opinion and nothing more," a representative of National Counter-Terrorism Committee (NAK) was quoted. Alexander Torshin, deputy speaker of Russia's Federal Council and a member of NAK - Russia's government body coordinating anti-terrorism policies, said in February 25 newspaper interview, that he was sure the terrorist act at Domodedovo was ordered by the Georgian leadership. Georgian President's spokesperson, Manan Manjgaladze, said on March 1 that this allegation such "absurd" that it was not even worth of commenting. Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister, Nino Kalandadze, said on February 28, that the it was a "purposeful provocation" and "absolutely groundless allegation."

NATO APOLOGIZES FOR DEATHS OF 9 BOYS IN AFGHANISTAN

2 March

NATO's top commander in Afghanistan apologized Wednesday for the accidental killing of nine Afghan boys and ordered attack helicopter crews to be briefed again on his directive for preventing civilian deaths. Civilian casualties have long been a source of friction between the U.S.-led international force and Afghan President Hamid Karzai. The president condemned the deaths, saying the victims were "innocent children who were collecting firewood for their families during this cold winter." "Is this the way to fight terrorism and maintain stability in Afghanistan?" Karzai asked in a statement Wednesday. He said NATO should focus more on "terrorist sanctuaries" — a phrase he typically uses when referring to Taliban havens in neighboring Pakistan. The incident on Tuesday in the Pech valley area of Kunar province came less than two weeks after tribal elders there claimed NATO forces killed more than 50 civilians in recent air and ground strikes. The coalition denied that claim, saying video showed troops targeting and killing dozens of insurgents. It said a subsequent investigation yielded no evidence that civilians had been killed. An Afghan government investigation, however, maintained that 65 civilians died in coalition operations in a remote part of the province. Several hundred villagers in the area protested for four hours Wednesday against coalition strikes. Demonstrators chanted "Death to America" and "Death to the spies," a reference to what they said was bad intelligence given to helicopter weapons teams, said Noorullah Noori, a member of the local development council in Manogai district. He said four of the nine boys killed were 7 years old, three were 8, one was 9 years old and one was 12. One child was also wounded, he said. He said the children were gathering wood under a tree in the mountains about near a village in the district. "I myself was involved in the burial," Noori said. "Yesterday we buried them." NATO said there apparently was miscommunication in passing information to coalition helicopters about the location of militants firing on Forward Operating Base Blessing. "We are deeply sorry for this tragedy and apologize to the members of the Afghan government, the people of Afghanistan and most importantly, the surviving family members of those killed by our actions," said Gen. David Petraeus, the top commander of U.S. and international troops in Afghanistan. "These deaths should have never

happened and I will personally apologize to President Karzai." (AP)

FOUR CANDIDATES TO RUN IN KAZAKH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

2 March

Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission has announced that it has officially registered four candidates to run in the April 3 presidential election. Incumbent Nursultan Nazarbaev, Zhambyl Akhmetbekov of the Communist People's Party, Gani Kasymov of the Patriots' Party, and independent candidate and environmentalist Mels Eleusizov have until April 1 to campaign. Twenty-two people originally announced their intention to run: 11 failed the mandatory language proficiency test and the other seven were unable to meet other registration requirements. (RFE/RL)

SAAKASHVILI REITERATES GEORGIA'S AFGHAN COMMITMENT

2 March

Despite loss of life among Georgian troops in Afghanistan, Georgia should not give up its contribution to the coalition forces, President Saakashvili said while visiting a base of MoD's special purpose unit on March 2. "It is an honor to be in service of the homeland together with you," said Saakashvili, sitting alongside with soldiers in an army base canteen. Saakashvili's five-year old younger son, who like his father was dressed in a military uniform, was sitting next to him. "I never stop thinking and caring about our armed force and helping it as much as possible. You should know that our country knows that it can pin hope on you," Saakashvili told soldiers. "We suffered losses in Afghanistan... But we should understand that for the armed forces all these losses should serve as a source for further strengthening... We should not flinch and we should in no way give it up; our cause is just and we all know that," he said. Georgia has 950 troops in Afghanistan with most of them deployed in the Helmand province. Six Georgian soldiers were killed, all of them in Helmand, since joining the NATO-led operation in November, 2009. The most recent fatality was reported on February 22. On the same day the Georgian Parliament approved a proposal to send to Afghanistan a team of 11 Georgian artillery instructors to train the Afghan military. In a February, 2010 classified diplomatic dispatch from series of leaked U.S. embassy cables, published by WikiLeaks, U.S. ambassador to Georgia, John Bass,

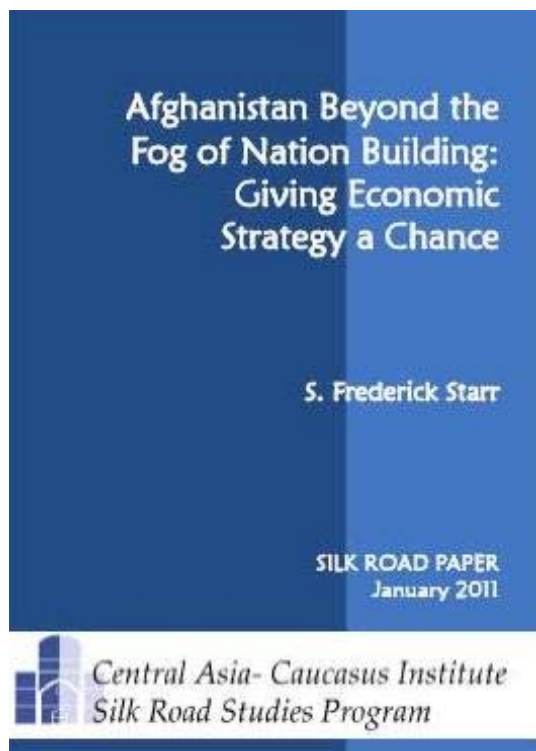
writes, that "Georgians see their contributions to Afghanistan as a down payment on their admission into NATO." "Georgia continues to be a strong supporter of NATO operations and is a contributor to international security missions, including in particular ISAF in Afghanistan. The challenge is to express our appreciation for those efforts, but deliver the candid message that such contributions are a helpful, but insufficient step toward membership without the concomitant progress on the civilian side," the cable reads. (Civil Georgia)

RUSSIA, TURKEY CONTINUE COOPERATION ON SAMSUN-CEYHAN PIPELINE

2 March

Russia and Turkey plan during a meeting of their inter-governmental commission on March 4 to sign an agreement to continue cooperation on the Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline project. "We're going to sign a document on the Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline from the point of view of the further plan of action, which involves determining the economic model," Russian Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko told reporters in Tambov. Then, during the next stage, "the partners should make the relevant

commitments to fill the pipeline," he said. The Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline project responds to Turkish demands for a route bypassing the crowded Dardanelles and Bosphorus. The 555-km pipeline will be used to deliver oil from the Black Sea basin to Europe. Eni, Calik, Rosneft and Transneft signed a memorandum of understanding concerning possible creation of a joint venture to build Samsun-Ceyhan in October 2009. Turkey estimates that the pipeline will cost about \$4 billion to build, but the other participants think the actual total will be higher. Russia hopes to agree the parameters with Turkey for involvement in the Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline project by the middle of March, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin said in December following talks with Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Taner Yyldyz in December. Sechin said Rosneft (RTS: ROSN) and Transneft (RTS: TRN) may each receive a 25% interest in the planned Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline. They might join current project participants Turkish Calik and Italian Eni. "The companies are currently negotiating their participation in capital at roughly 25% each," Sechin said. (Interfax)



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