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**ANALYST**

**BIWEEKLY BRIEFING**

**Wednesday, November 5, 2003**

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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/November 5, 2003

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On October 15, the Uzbek police in Tashkent terminated a demonstration of the banned Erk ("freedom") political opposition party. The party was protesting against the government's confiscation of its property, including documents and books. This was the first public protest in Uzbekistan by the party's supporters in twelve years. This suggests an overall escalation of tensions between the country's rigorous political regime and non-state actors. Being the US's partner in the Afghan war, the Uzbek government is now confronted with a choice of tactics towards Erk's growing activity.

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## **EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES**

*The Analyst* is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* ([www.cacianalyst.org](http://www.cacianalyst.org)) and described below.

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### **Analytical Articles:**

Analytical articles require a three to four sentence introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples.

Analytical article structure:

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

**BACKGROUND:** 200-300 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

**IMPLICATIONS:** 200-300 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

### **Specifications for Field Reports:**

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 500-700 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: [svante.cornell@pcr.uu.se](mailto:svante.cornell@pcr.uu.se) and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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## PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN GEORGIA: A TEST OF DEMOCRACY

Maia Gvritshvili

*On November 2, parliamentary elections were held in Georgia alongside a referendum on the reduction of the number of seats in Parliament to 150. The popular participation in the elections exceeded expectations. The results of the elections were according to all independent observers a serious loss for the party in power. Preliminary official results show the governmental alliance narrowly coming out first, amid widespread allegations of fraud. By November 4, opposition demonstrations organized by the "Burjanadze-Democrats" and "Saakashvili-Nationalist" blocks were gathering supporters by the hundreds, threatening unrest as the final results are expected on November 5.*

**BACKGROUND:** The parliamentary elections were of great importance for Georgia. These elections were understood as a test of democracy which was all the more important as they formed a dress rehearsal for the Presidential Elections of 2005. Moreover, the parliamentary elections will bring forward the political spectrum that will govern the country in the post-Shevardnadze period.

Domestic and western experts agree that no election held in a post-Soviet countries has elicited more international interest. The high number of observers, over 2,000, illustrates this. American interests have been most visible. After the visit of former secretary of state James Baker earlier this year, Senator John McCain visited Georgia in early October, reiterating America's commitment to the accomplishment of fair and transparent elections in Georgia. According to Mark Malen, director of the National Democratic Institute, "the fate of the elections is in the hands of Georgia's citizens". He considered that all parties, in one way or another, should take responsibility for holding fair elections.

The unrest following the presidential elections in Azerbaijan also affected the international community's attitude. It was widely assumed in Georgia that international community would not be as lenient towards Georgia as it had been in Azerbaijan. This assumption was proven right as Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, declared Europe's intent to strictly supervise the election process in Georgia, which will then demonstrate the future of Georgia's ambition to be fully integrated in Euro Atlantic Space. Fears that Russia would utilize the election process to further the destabilization of Georgia were also rife before the elections.

The array of forces contesting the elections were dominated by parties or alliances claiming to be in opposition, and in a sense competing with one another on being in true opposition. Three major political parties, which came out leading in pre-election ratings, are all originally breakaway factions of the formerly ruling "Citizens' Union of Georgia". First among these was the National Movement, led by former Justice Minister Michael Saakashvili. The National Movement won the local elections, putting Saakashvili as the Head of the Tbilisi city administration. The second block, the "Burjanadze Democrats", was an alliance of two former parliamentary speakers under Shevardnadze, Nino

Burjanadze and Zurab Zhvania. Finally, the New Rights party led by David Gamkrelidze and Levan Gachechiladze contested the last elections under the umbrella of the Citizens' Union of Georgia.

Aside from these, the Labor Party considers all the above parties for not being a true opposition. Likewise, the Revival Union (Agordzineba) was the main competitor of the Citizens' Union previously, and is the ruling party of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. The unification of the opposition, while strongly desired in society, was made impossible by the personal ambition of the various leaders, almost all of whom aspire openly or secretly to become the President of Georgia.

The electorate, moreover, is mainly oriented toward the personality of the leaders and not on the political ideology or political/economic programs of the parties. Hence, all political parties are identified with its leader and not its political program, as is even clear from the commonly used names for these parties.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Just as had happened in Azerbaijan, the opposition made statements in the pre-election period that the falsification of the elections was inevitable. Once results were being generated, public demonstration that carried a potential of civil unrest also became all but inevitable. The events in Azerbaijan also led to an expectation of unrest following Georgia's elections.

Most controversy surrounded the voters' registration lists, with the government, the opposition, the Central Election Commission and NGOs all accusing each other of falsifying the lists. However, opinion polls were also an important destabilizing factor in the election campaign. The discrepancy between the results of pre-election polls and the actual election results, as expected, became a major reason for unrest after the election.

The preliminary official results showed the Governmental "For New Georgia" bloc leading with over 24% of the vote, followed by the National Movement with 22%, the Labor Party with 13%, the Burjanadze-Democrats with close to 9%, and the New Rights Party barely over the 7% threshold. While these results showed ca. 70% of the votes going to the opposition, they were also fiercely contested, as parallel tabulations and exit polls had all shown the National

Movement over six percentage points ahead of the Governmental Bloc. Both official and independent results were most disappointing for the Burjanadze-Democrats, whose rating prior to the elections had varied between first and second place.

International observers showed little leniency while assessing the elections. Mr. Bruce George, special coordinator of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, noted that "these elections have, regrettably, been insufficient to enhance the credibility of either the electoral or the democratic process". Reports of voter intimidation, violence, ballot box stuffing, all came in gradually on election day, showing the government's desire to secure continued control over the parliament.

**CONCLUSION:** While final results are not yet released, it is clear that the largest faction in parliament will be the governmental one, while the opposition, even by official results, won a large victory. The exact distribution of seats remains to be determined. The further development of events will depend less on the CEC final results than on the scope of opposition demonstrations.

The prospects for instability, as well as the final reports of the international observers, will be the main factors determining Georgia's future relationship with the international community. It is clear, however, that Shevardnadze position is increasingly fragile.

**AUTHOR BIO:** Maia Gvritishvili is a Tbilisi-based independent journalist.

## INAUGURATION OF THE AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT

*Ilham Aliyev on October 28, 2003 became the fourth President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, after Azerbaijan's Constitutional court (CC) confirmed the final results of the presidential elections held on October 15. According to official data, Ilham Aliyev received 76,84 % of the votes.*

The Head of the Central Electoral Commission Mazahir Panahov declared that the elections were free and fair. Simultaneously the secretary of the CEC from the opposition, Vidadi Mahmudov, declared that everyone knew in advance that some provisions of the Election Code were "in the hands of" the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, and it consequently became an obstacle for carrying out democratic elections.

In a ceremony on October 31, President Aliyev was inaugurated in the Republic palace, with 2000 guests. Among the present were government officials, scientists and cultural figures, representatives of the diplomatic corps and business entities working in Azerbaijan, and 300 specially invited foreign visitors, including the president of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze, the head of Council of Federation of the Russian Federation Sergey Mironov, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Igor Ivanov, prime minister of Ukraine Victor Yanukovich, vice-president of Iran Muhamedali Abtahi, vice-premier of Turkey Abdulatif Sener, the special representative of the European Union on the South Caucasus Heikki Talvitie. Even some leaders of opposition, such as the chairmen of "Adalat" party Ilyas ismayilov and Civil solidarity party Sabir Rustamhanli, also took in the ceremony.

Putting his hand on the Constitution, Ilham Aliyev declared that as president he will adhere to the Constitution of the country, protect the state's independence and territorial integrity, and serve the people in a worthy manner. Further, having put his hand on the Qur'an, the head of the state has declared: "I Swear, that I will remain devoted to the national and cultural values and traditions built by the people of Azerbaijan during centuries, and will constantly hold them above all".

Aliyev declared that during his presidency, democracy, political tolerance, freedom of speech will all be developed, and Azerbaijan will turn into a modern state. He emphasized that he is devoted to Heydar Aliyev's policy and will never turn from this way.

The Inauguration ceremony was aired live on state and private TV channels. It ended with the national hymn and grandiose fireworks above the night of Baku.

The main opposition Musavat party still does not recognize the results of the presidential elections. According to Musavat press secretary Mehman Javadoglu, this position was confirmed at the party meeting.

Pressure on the opposition began after the events of October 15-16, when supporters of Musavat leader Isa Gambar, dissatisfied with the results of the elections, engaged in unrest. One person was killed and about 200 injured in ensuing clashes with police.

Minister of Internal Affairs Ramil Usubov stated that 625 persons had been detained. Of these, 77 were arrested and legal proceedings have been initiated against them. The official

press even published the list of arrested persons who participated in events on October 15-16. These include Musavat deputy chairmen Sulhaddin Akper, Ibrahim Ibrahimli, Arif Hajiyev, Rauf Arifoglu; People's party leader Panah Huseynov, secretary general of the Democratic party Sardar Jalaloglu, Umid party leader Iqbal Agazade. 548 persons have been released.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Public Prosecutor published a joint statement, which notes that 112 representatives of law enforcement bodies were injured during the mass disorders, while serious material damage has been made to official bodies, business entities and means of transportation. The law enforcement bodies in this sense reacted to statements of a commission of experts of the UN Commission on human rights, which expressed "deep concern" regarding the situation in Azerbaijan. The experts expressed particular concern on reprisals against participants in recent anti-government demonstrations, and called Azerbaijani officials to observe international obligations in the field of human rights, as well as to carry out an open and independent investigation of the numerous allegations of police brutality.

Many observers are concerned about the direction of official Baku's foreign policy after the election of a new president. The head of the department of international relations of the presidential office, Novruz Mamedov noted that Ilham Aliyev is not going to change the foreign policy followed by Heydar Aliyev.

**Gulnara Ismailova**

## KYRGYZ ANTITERRORIST FORCES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Roger N. McDermott

*In October 2003, the Kyrgyz National Guard commander Lieutenant-General Abdygul Chotbayev hosted a meeting in Kyrgyzstan with his American counterpart, General John Prendergast, to deepen cooperation between the U.S. and Kyrgyzstan. In spite of assistance, the gulf that persists between the National Guards from each state is staggering: the Kyrgyz National Guard is the same in name only, consisting of regular servicemen, rather than reservists. They represent the finest of the antiterrorist forces in the Kyrgyz republic, and its problems seem reminiscent of those afflicting its armed forces during the antiterrorist campaigns in the Batken in 1999 and 2000.*

**BACKGROUND:** The National Guard constitutes part of the Kyrgyz armed forces and is placed under the control of the President of the Republic and it is part of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF). It played a key role in the counter-insurgency campaign in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan in 1999. It is tasked with the protection of foreign dignitaries visiting Kyrgyzstan, responsible for the security of critical infrastructure, clearing up in the aftermath of a natural disaster and crucially it fulfils a vital part of the country's antiterrorist capabilities. The National Guard antiterrorist units consist of three separate units; the 'Panthers,' 'Snow Leopards' and 'Edelweiss.' The Panthers differ from other Special Forces units from the Ministry of Defense (MoD), Ministry of Interior (MVD) or the National security service, insofar as they possess an airborne capability. Selection for the National Guards is understandably more rigorous than standards found elsewhere in the armed forces. Fitness levels are expected to match those of the airborne troops. On the surface, it is replicating the pattern of elite forces internationally, insisting on higher standards to carry out often difficult and specialized combat operations. Their training, however, is no different to that given to similar units in the MoD. Nevertheless, there are clear challenges facing the National Guard.

Given the lack of funds and problems of adequately financing modernization of existing weapons and equipment, the National Guard lacks modern weapons, as well as night vision equipment, body armor and, crucially, air mobility, since the Kyrgyz air force is essentially grounded due to fuel shortages. Basic issues, such as the manufacture and supply of uniforms, continue to beset efforts to raise standards within the various units. Most uniforms worn by the servicemen have been made abroad, or given to them by the Chinese.

Chotbayev confirmed that the defense budget allocation for the National Guard is wholly inadequate, receiving around 20 percent of the sum it calculates as necessary—even this if often not fully paid. Indeed, such state-imposed hardships compel servicemen to seek alternative arrangements, often relying on bartering or corruption. Officers serving in the National Guard are paid between 1,400 – 2,300 Soms, leaving

them a long way from the levels of salary envisaged by even modest military reform plans.

Problems common to the post-Soviet militaries are evident within the Kyrgyz armed forces, based on national conscription and suffering from underfunding and years of neglect. These conditions also pertain to its elite forces, particularly the phenomenon of 'hazing' or institutionalized bullying within the barracks. Chotbayev readily admits that these problems exist, though he suggests that all is being done to encourage soldiers to turn to officers with concerns rather than inflicting violence on their colleagues. As Chotbayev accepts, hazing is an endemic problem afflicting the contemporary Kyrgyz armed forces.

In this context, it is hardly surprising to find instances of soldiers going AWOL. Yet the elite National Guard, with its higher standards and critical security role, proves no exception. On the fence surrounding its barracks in Bishkek, their are boot marks clearly visible, which were reportedly made by escaping soldiers. The antidote to such problems, which saps morale and projects an image of weakness and corruption, comes in the ever-increasing promises of the Akayev government to improve conditions in the armed forces.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The conditions in the Kyrgyz armed forces remain poor, and this appears to be reflected even within its most privileged units. Chotbayev, however, sees the solution to the problems of the National Guard in abstract measures such as achieving token permanent representation within the U.S. National Guard in Montana. Such aspirations, as noble as they are in practice, reflect Kyrgyzstan's need to promote its security interests through its 'multi-layered' foreign policy, which results in seeking security assistance wherever it can be found. This is borne out by closely following its international assistance goals. It cooperates closely with the US National Guard, sharing experience, sending its cadets to the U.S. for language courses and receiving training at the Montana National Guard military schools.

Meanwhile, in addition to its military ties to Russia, similar activities are also envisaged in China, Turkey and elsewhere. Kyrgyzstan is developing closer security links with China.

Indeed, the National Guard is the only security body in Kyrgyzstan that cooperates with the People's Liberation Army and the Chinese police. Levels of cooperation are likely to deepen still further, bilaterally with China, and within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In 2004, Beijing plans to send 1,000 uniforms and build two barracks, further deepening ties with the Kyrgyz National Guard.

In early October, in an alarming development, three officers from the Kyrgyz National Guards were arrested on suspicion of involvement in the terrorist attacks in Osh in 1998 and the bombing of a market place in Bishkek in December 2002. Although all three, currently remanded in custody, are not thought to have actively instigated the bombings, they are alleged to have had involvement in supplying explosives. A combination of factors, social and economic, has contributed to the sorrowful condition of rogue elements in the antiterrorist units becoming part of the security problem in the country, rather than part of the solution.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Since the deployment of U.S. and coalition forces in Central Asia and the basing of the U.S. military at Ganci, President Akayev has repeatedly defined the objectives of Kyrgyz military reform. He has expounded the view that Kyrgyzstan needs small, mobile forces, professionally manned and trained, capable of dealing with

the threats posed by terrorism and insurgency. Professionalizing the Kyrgyz armed forces, whilst laudable in theory, remains many years away from becoming a reality. Currently, the military continues to be weak, and the country relies on the benevolence of foreign powers providing security assistance, whether on a bilateral basis or through its participation in international and regional security bodies, ranging from its participation in NATO's PfP, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the SCO. The continued deprivations and weakness of even the most elite military units in Kyrgyzstan, tasked with antiterrorist functions, clearly causes concern amongst those seeking to enhance regional security. Without the active engagement of the Akayev government, convincing Kyrgyz policy makers of the necessity to reform these bodies and assume responsibility for enhancing their capabilities, Kyrgyzstan can only be expected to continue to look to outside powers to provide real security.

**AUTHORS' BIO:** Roger N. McDermott is an honorary senior research associate, department of politics and international relations, university of Kent at Canterbury (UK).

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## OPENING OF RUSSIAN AIRBASE IN KYRGYZSTAN

*Concluding his Asian tour, which included visits to India, China and Thailand, Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived to Bishkek on October 24. The agenda of the visit was to discuss cooperation between Russia and Kyrgyzstan in the political, economic, humanitarian and security spheres. The major event was the inauguration of the Russian base, which has become the first new Russian military base on foreign lands since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.*

The opening ceremony was accompanied with festivities and an air show. The airbase in Kant, a small town 20 km away from the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, was established as a part of the rapid deployment force under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The CSTO was formed two years ago by six former Soviet republics: Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Tajikistan and Belarus. At the press conference following the opening ceremony, the Russian president said that "by creating an air shield here in Kyrgyzstan we expect to strengthen security in the region, whose stability has become a tangible factor affecting the development of the international situation". In his turn, Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev stated firmly that "the Russian airbase in Kant will ensure the security of the territory and airspace of Kyrgyzstan".

The Kyrgyz Information Agency Kabar reports Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov saying that Russia is very much concerned about massive

trafficking of cheap drugs and arms through the territory of Central Asia. He is convinced that the Kant airbase will provide favorable conditions to limit the spread of arms, drugs and Islamic extremism coming from neighboring Afghanistan and Tajikistan. "This move will boost security in the region. Security in Central Asia has a direct influence on Russia's security. The presence of Russia including military in this region is in our interest". Mr. Akaev remarked that the opening of the Russian airbase is "a concrete realization of the aims of the rapid deployment force and for Kyrgyzstan it will also represent powerful security umbrella".

Most of journalists' questions at the press conference were concerned with the coexistence of the Russian airbase in Kant with the neighboring airbase run by U.S.-led anti-terrorist coalition and the possible heightening of geopolitical competition in the region. Mr. Putin said that he is not concerned with the presence of the American airbase in Manas. He said that Russia, being a member of the international anti-terrorist coalition, backs up the actions of the international community. Putin explained that he sees no reason for competition and contradiction as two airbases have completely different missions. "The American base, the base of the international coalition, was set up for a concrete task to last during the operation

in Afghanistan. The Kant airbase will provide security for Kyrgyzstan, for the whole region and will create favorable conditions for fighting terrorism in the Russian Federation itself". Interfax reports Putin saying that "Manas base is temporary while new Russian base has been opened on a permanent basis".

Local and international experts agree that this move is made in order to reassert Russia's influence in Central Asia, which has severely diminished after the break up of the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan and arrival of western military troops to the region. Despite numerous statements that deny the notion of rivalry and competition, many observers think that the establishment of an airbase is an obvious attempt to counter the growing U.S. influence in the strategic and oil-rich Central Asia. Many experts see no immediate threat endangering stability in the region. Thus the establishment of the Russian airbase in Central Asia has more to do with political symbolism rather than military significance. Local experts are not very optimistic about the peaceful and easy coexistence of the US and Russian forces in Kyrgyzstan. They say that such a balancing strategy between the two forces could end up in an open rivalry for influence and finally push the Kyrgyz authorities to make a clear-cut geopolitical choice.

**Maria Utyaganova**

## ASSESSING THE SAUDI-RUSSIAN SUMMIT: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING?

Mark N. Katz

*Moscow and Riyadh are the world's two largest oil producers, and they have competed head-to-head over oil prices and market share for many years. The summit meeting between President Putin and Crown Prince Abdallah (the Kingdom's de facto ruler) in Moscow at the beginning of September was nevertheless seen by many as presaging a powerful new Saudi-Russian partnership. The signing of a five-year agreement on oil and gas cooperation raised the possibility that Moscow and Riyadh would cooperate to keep oil prices high. Just a few weeks after this summit, however, Moscow and Riyadh are once again pursuing competitive interests in the oil sphere, and the significance of their partnership appears doubtful.*

**BACKGROUND:** Saudi Arabia and OPEC have long sought to regulate world oil prices through adhering to production quotas. OPEC has frequently called upon the major non-OPEC producers (which include Russia, Mexico, and Norway) to “do their part” to support oil prices by cutting back on production when OPEC does so. Instead of complying with this request, however, the major non-OPEC producers have maintained or even expanded their production. Riyadh has become particularly concerned about the rapidly expanding production of Russian oil companies in recent years since this has not only eaten into Saudi market share, but has threatened to drive oil prices below the \$22-28 range preferred by Saudi Arabia. Partly due to oil market jitters before and during the war in Iraq and the inability so far to restore Iraq's massive oil production potential, oil prices have been at the high end of this range, or higher, during 2003. But with the continued expansion of Russian production and the likely restoration of Iraqi production in the near future, downward pressure on oil prices appears likely to increase.

Saudi Arabia does not want to cut back on oil production while Russia is raising its, since this would amount to a “free ride” for Moscow at Riyadh's expense. The Saudis, though, apparently came to the Moscow summit hoping they could persuade their Russian counterparts that it was in Moscow's interests to cut Russian oil production when OPEC did so in order to prevent an oil price collapse. Much to Riyadh's disappointment, Moscow would not agree.

Moscow argues that the Russian government cannot do this because it does not exercise the same kind of control over its oil companies that most OPEC producing countries do. While companies are state-owned or state-controlled in the major OPEC countries, there are several large private oil companies in Russia. But at a time when the Putin administration appears to be tightening its control over the Russian petroleum sector—as was dramatically shown by the arrest of Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the Saudis are understandably skeptical about this claim. What they do see clearly, though, is that Russian oil firms—with Moscow's approval—are aggressively seeking to increase their exports to the United States. Further, part of Moscow's strategy for doing this appears to be through the portrayal of Russian

firms as more reliable partners willing to sell at a lower price while Saudi Arabia and OPEC are the unreliable ones who want higher prices. On the other hand, when OPEC (led by Saudi Arabia) does cut production, Riyadh sees that Russian oil firms are willing to take advantage of this by selling at a higher price without bearing the costs associated with sharing in production cuts.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Less than a month after the Putin-Abdallah summit, Saudi-Russian tensions have re-emerged over oil pricing policy. In late September, OPEC announced that it was trimming output by 900,000 b/d, or 3.5% of production, in order to shore up softening world oil prices. OPEC further announced, though, that it would not undertake any further cuts unless the major non-OPEC producers share in them—even if this leads to a dramatic drop in oil prices.

Continued Saudi-Russian disagreement over oil pricing and production levels could have a negative effect on their cooperation in other areas. Moscow has long hoped for large-scale Saudi investment in the Russian oil sector, the participation of Russian companies in the Saudi oil and gas sectors, and the initiation of Russian arms sales to Riyadh. But if Russian oil firms do not agree to cut back their production levels when OPEC does so, the Kingdom is unlikely to oblige Russia in these other areas. The newly formed Saudi-Russian partnership, then, could prove to be a very limited one indeed.

While Moscow and Riyadh have not been able to agree on oil pricing policy or on production limitations, one thing that they can agree on—if only tacitly—is that neither welcomes competition in the oil market from Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan. Ironically, while Saudi-Russian cooperation to keep oil prices relatively high would have meant higher prices for oil from these countries too, Saudi-Russian price competition will mean relatively lower prices for them. Further, lower oil prices will make it less profitable for Western oil companies to invest in additional development of Caspian Basin oil resources.

Many in the Russian government and oil sector appear to have convinced themselves that while the Saudis might threaten a price war, they would not dare to undertake one.



This is because even though Saudi oil production costs of \$1-2 per barrel are much lower than Russian ones of \$6-12 or more, they see the Saudi government as far more dependent on oil revenue than the Russian government. Because Saudi government expenses are so great, the Russians see them as dependent on keeping oil prices in the mid \$20's. Since the Russian government, by contrast, bases its budget calculations on a price of \$18/barrel (with anything over that providing a welcome revenue surplus), Moscow has apparently concluded that it can withstand a lower oil price than the Saudis, and that Riyadh will have to agree to Moscow's terms for relief.

**CONCLUSIONS:** This, however, could be a miscalculation. The Saudi government demonstrated its willingness to run up

large budget deficits throughout the 1980's and 1990's. Further, if Saudi Arabia really wanted to, it could ramp up production so much that the price of oil falls below Russia's per barrel production cost, but remains above the Kingdom's own. Nor could Moscow expect much sympathy from the U.S. and other oil-consuming nations—the immediate beneficiaries of an oil price war for as long as it lasted. If Moscow does not come to the realization that Riyadh holds the upper hand in a price war before one starts, it risks acquiring this knowledge in a far more painful manner afterward.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Mark N. Katz is a professor of government and politics at George Mason University.

## ADIL SOZ CONFRONTS THE GOVERNMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN

*The controversy surrounding Kazakhstan's draft law on the media currently under consideration in Parliament has become quieter after a flurry of negative remarks and accusations when the draft was first introduced Oct. 21. That week, several remarks were made by the Ministry of Information, including accusations that freedom-of-speech group Adil Soz misinforms the public and a refutation of the idea of the media as a "fourth power."*

Officials and journalist groups disagree on the new draft media law. While government officials say the law is designed to protect journalists, press-freedom analysts have pointed to several articles of the law that could be used to further infringe on press freedom.

The harsh statements from the ministry are likely an attempt to silence criticism from journalist groups. Although the ministry touts its roundtables and discussions on the draft media law as a positive sign of public discourse, several journalist groups have criticized the version introduced to Parliament. After months of public hearings and discussions around Kazakhstan on the draft media law, ministry officials claim that more than half of the 500 suggestions from journalists have been incorporated into the recent draft.

However, journalists criticized the draft introduced to Parliament Oct. 20, claiming their suggestions were only included in the final draft if they did not change the substance of the law, Interfax reported.

At the hearing, the Ministry of Information released a statement expressing "bewilderment" because it had been systematically excluded from forums about the law organized by the International Foundation for the Protection of Free Speech Adil Soz. The ministry's statement accused the organization of "misinforming society about the new law, and constructive criticism is replaced by criticism bordering on dilettantism."

That day, Adil Soz President Tamara Kaleeva told reporters, "This statement is no more than an attempt to discredit our work." Kaleeva also said the fund had invited the ministry officials to the forums organized by the group.

In addition, she accused the ministry of excluding Adil Soz's representatives from the group working on the draft law. In a statement released later, she wrote, "Rummage... through the archives [of the ministry]. You will discover in them not only a letter from the Adil Soz foundation with a request to include the lawyers of Fund in a structure of workgroup but also a refusal signed by Vice Minister Ardak Doszhan."

This statement was published on Adil Soz's Web site and in the opposition newspaper *Ekonomiki. Financ. Rynki*, which has been closed three times, reopening each time under a different name. Last year the newspaper's offices were firebombed.

The newspaper's editors have received no response from the government regarding this statement, said an *Ekonomiki. Financ. Rynki* journalist, who requested to remain anonymous. "Very rarely do we receive any answer from the government. They just ignore us," the journalist said. The journalist called these attempts at demeaning the press "funny" and "stupid," and said the criticism of Adil Soz is simply polemical because ministry officials are the ones who have ignored Adil Soz's events in the past. In addition, the journalist said, those representing journalists' interests in the group working on the draft law are more dependent on the government than other journalists, and that is why the government chose them.

The only response Adil Soz has received was in the vague form of the Oct. 21 speech from Information Minister Cauytbek Abdrakhmanov, the journalist said.

Abdrakhmanov's speech marked the presentation of the draft law to Parliament.

Abdrakhmanov told Parliament the media does not constitute a fourth "estate" or "power" in Kazakhstan, and such an idea is totally unfounded.

"Obviously, the 'fourth power' is an image representing the enormous importance of the mass media as an institute of civil society, but it is not a legal concept. ... The government is unified—item 3 of the constitution says that the legislative, executive and judicial branches share authority," he said. Instead of trying to wield power, he said newspapers should represent and voice the views of the population. The journalist pointed to these statements as further attempts to threaten the media and dissuade them from criticizing the government.

The statements have changed Adil Soz's view of its role. In an interview in September, Kaleeva said the authorities "do not like us—not at all," but she said the organization had an important role for the state. She called the organization "an example of the development of democracy in Kazakhstan," and said she had had few problems with the government.

In response to questions about the Information Ministry's statements, however, Kaleeva compared the situation to the beginning of a war. She said she was not surprised by the ministry's statements because "it is the usual practice of the ministry—to try by lying and juggling [facts] to discredit their opponent in the public's opinion."

Instead of expressing surprise, she noted a shift in the ministry's tactics. "Until now they were careful, but now they tried and we hit them back in war like in war," she said.

Representatives from various groups have expressed support for Adil Soz and Kaleeva, but do not comment extensively on the new media law. If war was declared with the Minister of Information's statements, journalists seem to be waiting for the next battle.

**Olivia Allison**

## THE ERK PROTEST SETS A PRECEDENT FOR KARIMOV TO REVISE RELATIONS WITH POLITICAL OPPOSITION

Erica Marat

*On October 15, the Uzbek police in Tashkent terminated a demonstration of the banned Erk ("freedom") political opposition party. The party was protesting against the government's confiscation of its property, including documents and books. This was the first public protest in Uzbekistan by the party's supporters in twelve years. This suggests an overall escalation of tensions between the country's rigorous political regime and non-state actors. Being the US's partner in the Afghan war, the Uzbek government is now confronted with a choice of tactics towards Erk's growing activity.*

**BACKGROUND:** The political opposition was eliminated in Uzbekistan shortly after Islam Karimov was elected president in 1992. The political power is centralized and free media is virtually non-existent. Erk was the first political party that formed in Uzbekistan in the late days of the Soviet regime, in the late 1980s. Like other political movements at the time, Erk was banned in the early 1990s. The party's leader, Mohammad Solih, was forced out of the country and Erk lost a significant part of its members.

In June of this year Erk conducted a reunion and promised to increase its political activity. Nearly thirty people, including Solih, gathered in the recent protest on Tashkent's central streets with placards expressing controversial statements about ending the persecution of dissidents and returning the party's illegally confiscated property. After marching for three kilometers the protestors were surrounded and severely beaten by more than fifty militia men. Some leaders of the protest were detained for several hours by the militia.

On October 22, a week after the demonstration, Erk held its 5th congress, in Tashkent, with 140 party members, representatives of the mass media and the international community. In his speech, Solih introduced the main principles of the party's political program that strives for the rapid democratization of Uzbek politics. According to Solih, Erk's activities should be characterized as attempts to build a constructive political opposition which, based on the party's program, would be able to systematically evaluate the government policies and participate in parliamentary and presidential elections. Erk's internal institutional structure has developed a decentralized distribution of powers and responsibilities which suggests that the Uzbek political opposition is gaining more credibility.

Erk's congress was held despite prior numerous impediments from the government side. During the congress, a group of about 25 people comprised of members of another opposition party "Birlik" and former members of Erk, broke into the room trying to disrupt the meeting. Excluded from Erk in 1996, Samad Murod was the most active among the intruders, insisting that he and not Solih was Erk's genuine leader. This incident testified to the internal split in the party

and disagreement between its major leaders, which may well have been fueled by the government.

Earlier manifestations of political opposition to the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan have mainly taken a violent form. The bombings in the center of Tashkent in the winter of 1999 and the insurgency conducted by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the territories of southern Kyrgyzstan and parts of Uzbekistan in the summers of 1999-2000 are the most prominent examples. They were followed by a harsh response by authorities to any threat, and Karimov's regime kept growing in authoritarianism.

The proliferating Uzbek-American relations, especially in the areas of military assistance in the war in Afghanistan but also in terms of significant economic cooperation, now bind Karimov's administration more tightly to its commitments to enhance the country's human rights record. This includes commitments to reduce censorship over the activity of the mass media and other civic organizations, as well as providing the grounds for political pluralism. Nevertheless, until recently, the situation in the country with regard to liberalization of politics and economy saw little progress.

**IMPLICATIONS:** According to assessments of international correspondents, the public perception of the Erk demonstration was marked with predominantly positive attitude in favor of the protestors. At the same time, the government's penalty to the Erk demonstration was relatively 'soft' compared to the treatment served to previous gusts of opposition. The detained demonstrators were released and, what is more, the outlawed party's congress was held with only slight interruptions by security structures.

Some observers argue that such a shift in the government reaction is a direct consequence of the U.S. presence in the country. Others, however, are inclined to think that it is possibly a sign of a veiled tactics of the Uzbek government aimed at splitting the opposition into conflicting and weaker fractions. The latter opinion is based on the assumption that if Karimov is to continue his ruthless persecution of political competitors, he will further need to rely on his personal stature and his relations with Washington. But if he will show signs of gradual liberalization of his regime and comply with

the American demands, he risks allowing an aggressive outbreak of the opposition that was once suffocated.

This tension is especially sensitive at the threshold of the presidential elections that are expected to be held within the next few years. Similarly to the neighboring countries, the opposition in Uzbekistan is yet weak and does not have a clear strategy for promoting the principles it advances. Although the number of political parties is mushrooming before the upcoming parliamentary elections next year, these mostly face denials to legal registration by the Uzbek Ministry of Interior. However, those parties which persist, such as Erk and Birlik, require a more sophisticated response from the government.

Furthermore, the reportedly declining health of the Uzbek president is an important factor of anxiety concerning internal stability in Uzbekistan. Observers have been reporting Karimov's frequent health treatments abroad and his sporadic public speeches. Rumors have grown among the public regarding his weakening control over the state, military structures and political opposition. Along with these rumors, the public is wary of facing an aggressive breakout of

underground political opposition. There is a significant public perception of the threat posed by Islamic radical movements in the country, as well as other counter-regime formations based on clan and family identities.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The political opposition in Uzbekistan has systematically undermined or forced out of the country. However, with the increasing political and economic involvement of the United States in the region, there are signs that the secular opposition is becoming more assertive, while the government shows initial signs of gradually changing its policies. The convertibility of the Uzbek currency is one example; another is the muted reaction of the Uzbek security structures to Erk's demonstration and congress. While these events clearly point to changing tactics on the part of Karimov's government toward the political opposition, it remains to be seen whether it constitutes a move towards the liberalization of the politics or a move to weaken and divide the opposition.

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## MEDIA COUNCIL: OPPORTUNITY TO SOME, SETBACK TO OTHERS

*In recent years, filing lawsuits against media outlets has occurred at an alarming frequency in Kyrgyzstan. A large number of court battles involving newspapers and journalists have triggered concern of local as well as international community. As a way of addressing this issue a new authority, a Media Council has been formed in Kyrgyzstan.*

The Media Council, which was first proposed by President Askar Akaev at a public gathering this summer and announced on September 13, consists of six journalists and three well-known public figures. Its clause says: "The Media Council is a voluntary corporate body created for the purpose of regulating the work of the mass media". The council, which is described as a regulatory body, aims to deal with the press disputes and to arbitrate in conflicts involving media. It also intends to protect journalists' rights, raise their professionalism and strengthen independence of media outlets.

The creation of the Media Council has generated different opinions among Kyrgyzstani journalists and public figures. The Director of the National news agency "Kabar" Kubanychbek Taabaldiev says that the formation of such an authority as Media Council points at improvements in the Kyrgyz media industry. According to him, such councils exist in developed countries and function as a public mechanism. The Council is a new way of solving conflicts involving media outlets, Taabaldiev added. The President's press-secretary Abdil Segizbaev is of a similar

opinion. According to him, the Media Council has a very important role in dealing with press disputes as it will address them without the involvement of courts. Evgeny Denisenko, from the Vecherny Bishkek newspaper, in his interview to IWPR said that he believes the council is an advisory body, which will provide journalists with "help in any difficult situation".

However, while the President's administration and a number of media outlets have been strong supporters of the Media Council, the idea of creating such a body has from the outset prompted opposition among others, especially among independent journalists and opposition newspapers. In the opinion of the Chief Editor of the opposition newspaper "Moya-Stolitsa Novosti" Aleksandr Kim, the formation of the Media Council is another tool for the government to control independent newspapers and to suppress the freedom of the press.

According to Kim, moreover, the creation of the council contradicts the country's legislation and it does not have any legal power. Alexei Sukhov, a journalist from the southern province of Osh, in an interview to IWPR expressed concerns about the way the Media Council had been formed. In his opinion, the process of establishing this authority was not open to public, mainly pro-governmental mass media took part in the process and most of the independent media outlets were left out of discussions.

Representatives of international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in their turn, questioned the credibility of the Media Council and have been skeptical about its potential and future possibilities. At a conference held in Bishkek recently, the OSCE's press freedom representative Freimut Duve said that the Council should have been created at the initiative of journalists, not of the country's leadership.

Meanwhile, in spite of credibility questions and suspicions, the Media Council has started its activity and as the first thing it conducted a special survey among media outlets of the country. According to the Head of the Council Aktan Abdykalykov, journalists in Kyrgyzstan today are concerned about three things: improvement of the working conditions of the media; improvement of the legislation concerning mass media; and raising the level of professionalism among journalists. However, it is not known what kind of measures will be taken in order to address these concerns. Nevertheless, addressing them would be more meaningful for Kyrgyz media than merely arbitrating among conflicting parties, which by itself will not solve the problem of continuing lawsuits, some local observers suggest.

**Aisha Aslanbekova**

## NEWS BITES

### **KYRGYZ-RUSSIAN INVESTMENT FORUM NETS AGREEMENTS WORTH \$14 MILLION**

**23 October**

A two-day Kyrgyz-Russian Investment Forum in Bishkek on 22-23 October resulted in the signing of agreements worth \$14 million. The forum was attended on its second day by Russian President Vladimir Putin, who told participants that Russia was particularly interested in investing in Kyrgyzstan's transport and energy sectors. Russian investors indicated that they wanted to bid on the electricity supplier Severoelektro, take part in the privatization of the state firm Kyrgyzgaz, and in the construction of the Kambar-Ata 2 power plant. Agreement was also reached on the Russian acquisition of shares in a number of Soviet-era military plants as a means of reducing Kyrgyzstan's external debt. (akipress.org)

### **CHECHEN LEADER NAMES CHIEF OF STAFF**

**24 October**

Chechen President-elect Akhmed Kadyrov named Ziyad Mukhamed Sabsabi, a Syrian-born Chechen, on 23 October to head his presidential staff. A graduate of the university of Damascus, Sabsabi subsequently studied journalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s at Leningrad State University. His fellow students were convinced that he functioned at that time as a KGB informer, according to chechenpress.com on 23 October. In early 1990, President Putin, at that time a KGB officer, occupied the post of adviser for international contacts to the university rector. Sabsabi acquired Russian citizenship in 1991. In the early 1990s, he served under then-Chechen President Djokhar Dudaev in the Chechen Foreign Ministry, but quit that post in early 1994. He became an assistant to Kadyrov in 1997, when the latter was Chechen mufti. (Interfax)

### **AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PARTY GIVEN ONE WEEK TO VACATE HEADQUARTERS**

**24 October**

The Baku Municipal Council has ordered the opposition Musavat Party to vacate the premises it currently occupies in Baku by 1 November. Mayor Hadjibala Abutalibov argued that the building in question is of historic and architectural significance, and therefore cannot be leased. Musavat Party Chairman Isa Qambar, who claims to have defeated Prime Minister Ilham Aliyev in the 15 October presidential election, rejected Abutalibov's argument as illogical, pointing out that the headquarters of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party are likewise located in a building that is designated an architectural and historic monument. (Turan)

### **FORMER RUSSIAN PRIME MINISTER ELABORATES ON PLAN TO RECONCILE STATE, OLIGARCHS AND WARNS AGAINST BOOSTING OIL EXPORTS**

**24 October**

In an interview with "Argumenty i fakty," No. 43, former Prime Minister and Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Yevgenii Primakov detailed the so-called Primakov Pact that he proposed earlier as a means of reconciling the oligarchs and the state in the wake of the Yukos investigations. Under the proposal, the state would promise not to revise the results of the 1990s-era privatizations, while the oligarchs would agree to direct more energy-export revenues to state coffers. Primakov told the weekly that he opposes any renationalization in the energy sector, but he thinks the oligarchs should be compelled to share some of their enormous profits. "In manufacturing, normal profit is about 14 percent," Primakov said. "But in the oil sector, it is 27 percent." In the same interview, Primakov said he sees no danger that the possible sale of stakes in oil companies such as Yukos to foreign corporations could lead to foreign control of Russia's oil sector. However, he said, it is possible that the money obtained from such sales could be moved abroad rather than invested in the domestic economy. He also said that the expansion of the Russian economy should not be accomplished by boosting energy exports. "We ourselves need our oil to develop our own economy," Primakov said. "In the Soviet era, we exported 22 percent of extracted oil. Now we export 70 percent." (RFE/RL)

### **RUSSIAN, KYRGYZ PRESIDENTS HAIL OPENING OF RUSSIAN AIR BASE**

**24 October**

"The setting up of a Russian air base in Kyrgyzstan will be a deterrent to all sorts of terrorists and extremists," ITAR-TASS quoted Russian President Vladimir Putin as saying at a ceremony to open the Russian air base in Kyrgyzstan today. He added: "One should not close one's eyes to the threats of terrorism coming from outside". Putin thinks that the base "will promote effective implementation of both national and collective tasks of the allies of Russia and Kyrgyzstan within the Collective Security Treaty (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia)". Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev said "Kyrgyzstan sees cooperation with Russia as a significant factor to ensure regional and global stability". "It would be premature to say the situation in the world and in our region is secure. Global and regional challenges to peace and security are continuing.

In such a situation Kyrgyzstan has become a key link in regional security and sees itself as Russia's strong political base in the region," the agency quoted Akayev as saying. Akayev also said " I would like to give an assurance today that Kyrgyzstan has been and will remain a true brother of Russia", the agency noted. (ITAR-TASS)

### **HUNDREDS SICK WITH TYPHOID IN TAJIK CAPITAL**

**24 October**

In Dushanbe, 270 people have been diagnosed with typhoid, at least one has died, and some 500 others have been hospitalized on suspicion of having contracted the disease. The outbreak, which has prompted the government to request assistance from the local UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs, was apparently caused by a failure to chlorinate the city's water supply, which mainly comes from the Varzo River. Over the past few days, radio and television have been transmitting Health Ministry warnings against drinking tap water and eating unwashed fruit. According to the ministry, 617 typhoid cases have been recorded in Dushanbe since the beginning of the year, representing a 64 percent increase over the same period in 2002. (AP)

### **AZERBAIJANI FOREIGN MINISTER URGES IRAN TO END BROADCASTS INTO SOUTHERN AZERBAIJAN**

**25 October**

Vilayet Guliev met with Iranian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Ahmad Qazai on 25 October and informed him of Baku's demand that Iran cease its "broadcasting and unauthorized transmission of Iranian Sahar-2 television" into Azerbaijan. Guliev criticized the Azeri-language broadcasts beamed into southern Azerbaijan for containing "anti-Azerbaijani propaganda" aimed at destabilizing the southern regions of the country, and faulted the Iranian government for "interference in Azerbaijan's internal affairs." Iranian officials have claimed that the broadcasts are beyond their control, as Sahar-2 is a privately owned station and merely expresses "its own position" in its programs. (ANS)

### **KAZAKH PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER NAMED HEAD OF NEW POLITICAL PARTY**

**25 October**

At a congress in Almaty on 25 October, the Asar (All Together) public movement transformed itself into a political party and unanimously elected Darigha Nazarbaeva, eldest daughter of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, the party's leader. The congress was attended by 1,300 delegates, who also selected a seven-person leadership council and adopted a party platform. At a news conference following the congress, Nazarbaeva rejected claims that she has presidential ambitions. "There is no alternative to

[President Nazarbaev]" for the next 10 years, she said, and advised his opponents not to waste resources on presidential campaigns, saying that if they try to unseat him, "they will lose." The next presidential election is due in December 2006. She added that, although she regards pro-presidential parties as Asar's natural allies, her party will actively compete against them in the parliamentary elections scheduled for autumn 2004. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

### **KABUL STRIKES DEAL WITH WARLORDS**

**26 October**

The government in Kabul has reached an agreement with two rival regional leaders in northern Afghanistan under which they will merge their forces, according to a senior advisor to the Afghan interior minister. There have been repeated outbreaks of factional fighting between soldiers loyal to the two leaders, Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ata Muhammad. The government's attempt to broker a deal comes as Kabul begins an ambitious United Nations-backed programme to disarm many of Afghanistan's private militias. Afghan officials say that under the deal, armed fighters loyal to General Dostum and General Mohammed will be merged under a single neutral commander to be appointed by Kabul. General Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek and one of the most powerful leaders in northern Afghanistan, is also President Karzai's special representative there. General Ata Mohammed, an ethnic Tajik, is a regional army commander with close ties to the defence minister. General Dostam used to be the undisputed power broker in the north, but Ata Mohammed's influence has grown since the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance took over Kabul after the fall of the Taleban. This power shift has led to repeated outbreaks of fighting between the two men's militias. The deal to merge their forces is an optimistic attempt to end this continual bickering as the government begins a major disarmament programme, backed by the UN. This programme, launched last week, aims to disarm up to 100,000 private militiamen across the country - either helping them to return to civilian life or integrating them into the new national army. With about 15,000 American, coalition and Nato troops now based in Afghanistan supporting the Kabul government, regional commanders know they have to behave. (BBC)

### **U.S. AMBASSADOR CRITICIZES KHODORKOVSKII ARREST**

**27 October**

Commenting on Mikhail Khodorkovskii's arrest, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow said the U.S. government is "concerned about this escalation of legal pressure being exerted on Yukos," "The Moscow Times" reported on 27 October. "We won't comment on the legal basis for Khodorkovskii's detention. It would appear, though, that the law is being applied selectively at the very

least," the newspaper quoted Vershbow as saying. He added that the arrest will "send a very negative signal to companies investing in or considering investing in Russia." "The Financial Times" reported on 26 October that merger discussions between Yukos and competing U.S. oil majors ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco have been temporarily halted until Khodorkovskii's fate "becomes clearer." The newspaper cited "people close to the situation." (RFE/RL)

### **RUSSIAN EXPERTS SUPPORT ARMENIAN REFUSAL TO CLOSE NUCLEAR-POWER PLANT** **27 October**

Several Russian nuclear-power experts announced on 24 October that they support the Armenian government's decision to continue operating Armenia's sole nuclear-power plant, according to RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau. In a statement released on 24 October, Armen Abakian, the director of a Moscow-based nuclear research institute, dismissed concerns that the Medzamor facility poses environmental risks and contended that the plant can safely operate for at least another 13 years. The European Union and several environmental groups have called on the Armenian government to close the aging Soviet-era plant, arguing that the plant's light-water reactor is inherently dangerous and unstable. Despite a preliminary agreement to close the plant by 2004, the Armenian government has reversed its position, and now seeks to keep the plant in operation. After its re-activation following a six-year closure, Medzamor now provides more than 50 percent of the country's energy needs, and the plant's management has been recently ceded to Russia's state-run Unified Energy Systems for five years in lieu of the repayment of some \$40 million in arrears for Russian supplies of nuclear fuel. (RFE/RL)

### **IMF TELLS KAZAKHSTAN TO REDUCE USE OF DOLLAR** **27 October**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has drawn up recommendations for Kazakhstan in the field of monetary policy, calling in particular for the country to reduce the role of the U.S. dollar in its economy. The IMF specialists who drew up the report said that reducing the use of the dollar will help Kazakhstan protect itself against crises in world markets, allow the country to establish its own currency policy more effectively, and help combat inflation. At the same time, the IMF warned the Kazakh leadership against taking overly harsh measures to reduce the number of dollars in circulation, such as closing dollar accounts in the country's banks or prohibiting the sale of dollars to individuals. (KazInform)

### **PRISONERS AT NOTORIOUS UZBEK PRISON DECLARE HUNGER STRIKE**

#### **27 October**

Prisoners at the notorious Yaslyk prison in the Karakalpakstan desert declared a hunger strike on 14 October, demanding that the authorities stop persecuting their families and friends, that violence against religious believers be stopped, and that they themselves be released. According to the IGPNPU (Uzbek Human Rights NGO), the prisoners were beaten by Interior Ministry troops and a number were sent to other prisons. The Yaslyk prison is notorious not only because of the extreme conditions there due to its location, but also because it is used primarily for political and religious prisoners. According to Uzbek human rights activists, Yaslyk has the highest death rate of any prison in the country, with inmates reportedly often dying as a result of torture. (Prima-News)

### **TAJKISTAN INTRODUCES GAS RATIONING**

#### **28 October**

Natural-gas rationing has been introduced in Tajikistan, although for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan rationing conditions are more liberal than is expected to be the case after the Ramadan ends on 24 November. During Ramadan, gas will be supplied to the population from 4 a.m. until 8 a.m. and from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. After Ramadan, gas is unlikely to be available during the day. The situation reportedly will change only if the Tajik gas firm Tojigaz can pay promptly for the gas it receives from Uzbekistan. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

### **AZERBAIJANI INTERIOR MINISTER EXPLAINS RATIONALE FOR ONGOING ARRESTS**

#### **28 October**

Ramil Usubov told Turan on 28 October that of an estimated 3,000 participants in the 16 October clashes with police in Baku, 625 were arrested, of whom all except 77 were released by 21 October. Usubov added, however, that more arrests are likely, as not all the estimated 300 "active participants" in the violence are in custody. Usubov admitted that 60-70 members of district election commissions are under arrest, but said they are being held because of their participation in the 16 October unrest, not because they steadfastly refused to endorse falsified election protocols. The Committee to Protest Falsification of the Vote and Repressions as estimates that 3,000 local-election-commission members who represent opposition parties refused to sign allegedly falsified election protocols, and many of them are currently hiding from police. (Turan)

### **WORLD BANK OFFICIAL OPPOSES CEDING MORE ARMENIAN ENERGY FACILITIES TO RUSSIA**

#### **29 October**

The transfer to Russia's state-run Unified Energy Systems (EES) of more Armenian energy facilities would be

"undesirable," World Bank official Gevorg Sargsian told RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau on 28 October. EES has acquired control of 80 percent of Armenia's power-generating capacity through a series of equity-for-debt agreements that cleared Yerevan's \$100 million debt to Moscow. Sargsian stressed that "we have nothing against EES or any other foreign company," but that the bank would prefer that other owners acquire the power facilities remaining to be privatized. (RFE/RL)

### **ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT AGREES THAT GUNMEN SHOULD NOT QUALIFY FOR PAROLE**

**29 October**

The pro-presidential parliamentary majority has acceded to a request by opposition deputies to debate an amendment to the new Criminal Code that would preclude the eventual granting of parole to the five parliament gunmen, for whom a prosecutor on 24 October demanded life imprisonment, if they are convicted, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported on 28 October. Despite opposition objections, parliament voted last month to abolish the death penalty unconditionally, replacing it with life imprisonment. The new Criminal Code provides for parole for people who have served more than 20 years of a life sentence. The opposition argues that those convicted of the parliament shootings should never be released from prison. (RFE/RL)

### **U.S. AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION LEADER**

**29 October**

Reno Harnish visited Musavat Party Chairman Isa Qambar, who is under house arrest, for 1 1/2 hours on 29 October to discuss the aftermath of the 15 October presidential election, Turan reported. Qambar refuses to recognize the validity of the official results of the ballot, according to which he polled just 13.97 percent of the vote, compared with 76.84 percent for Prime Minister Ilham Aliyev. Harnish said that political pressure on opposition supporters should be stopped but declined to comment on the 27 October arrest of Rauf Arifoglu, editor of the opposition newspaper "Yeni Musavat." (Turan)

### **FORMER AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT'S PARTY DENIES COOPERATING WITH AUTHORITIES**

**29 October**

In a statement released on 29 October, the Social-Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, one of the co-chairmen of which is exiled former President Ayaz Mutalibov, denied that the party has either established contact or embarked on cooperation with the ruling authorities. Mutalibov was quoted on 24 October by Interfax as criticizing both the opposition activists who participated in the violent clashes with police on 16 October and the authorities' harsh

reaction to that unrest. Mutalibov expressed the hope that "a balance can be restored between the authorities and the opposition," and that President-elect Aliyev will espouse a more flexible policy and demonstrate "political vision." (Turan)

### **ONE GEORGIAN PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATE SHOT AT, A SECOND ABDUCTED AND BEATEN**

**29 October**

Zviad Chokheli, a member of the opposition New Rightists who is running in the 2 November Georgian parliamentary elections in a single-mandate constituency, was shot at two times late on 29 October, surviving only thanks to a bulletproof vest, Georgian media reported. His car was destroyed by a bomb 30 minutes later, but Chokheli was not in the vehicle at the time. Also late on 29 October, Revival Union candidate Temur Goksadze was pulled from his car, beaten, and thrown into a river. (Caucasus Press)

### **UZBEK FARMERS STILL TOLD WHAT TO GROW**

**29 October**

Despite Uzbek President Islam Karimov's declared intention to develop private farming in Uzbekistan, farmers still do not have the right to decide for themselves what to grow, members of a national association of peasants and farmers who asked that their names not be used complained to Deutsche Welle. Karimov has told the Justice Ministry to prevent government agencies from interfering with the activities of farmers, but has also asserted that since land is allotted to farmers by commissions headed by oblast governors, farmers may grow only those crops specified in their contracts with the oblast administrations. Planting other crops is considered not only a misuse of the land, but constitutes a "grave violation" of the farmer's contract that would have legal consequences. In addition, farms that do not pay promptly for electricity, fuel, and other services can be broken up. The association members who spoke to Deutsche Welle said that such strict conditions are unlikely to stimulate private farming in Uzbekistan. (Deutsche Welle)

### **AFGHANISTAN ELECTION WARNING**

**29 October**

Violence and intimidation are threatening efforts to draft a new Afghan constitution, Human Rights Watch says. In an open letter to President Hamid Karzai, the New York-based watchdog called on the Afghan Government to crack down on warlords. It said they were interfering with the selection of candidates to the loya jirga or grand council due to discuss the draft constitution in December. A spokesman for Mr Karzai said the government and the United Nations were happy with progress on the constitution. Human Rights Watch says a climate of fear exists in every region of

Afghanistan. It says some candidates have received death threats and want to stay away from elections due to take place next year after the loya jirga has been held. It will debate the provisions of the new Afghan constitution, which is due to be made public imminently. The rights group collected its material during dozens of interviews conducted over the past three weeks. It says armed men and military commanders have threatened candidates in provinces in the north, forcing at least one of them to withdraw. In the western city of Herat political opponents of Governor Ismail Khan have been the target of assassination attempts, the letter to Mr Karzai says. Similar threats have been reported from Kandahar and Zabul provinces in the south. Human Rights Watch is calling upon the president to investigate those accused of making the threats and to speak out publicly against the violence. It is also urging him to bring in legislation disqualifying candidates if they are found guilty of intimidation. (BBC)

### **FINANCE MINISTER RULES OUT TAX PRIVILEGES FOR CHECHNYA**

**30 October**

Aleksei Kudrin told journalists in Moscow on 30 October that all federal taxes collected in Chechnya must be transferred to the central budget, whence they will be channeled back to Grozny to finance reconstruction. "We cannot afford the luxury of making any legal exceptions" to Russia's unified tax system, Kudrin explained. Akhmad-hadji Kadyrov, who was named the winner of the controversial 5 October Chechen presidential ballot, argued earlier this month that Chechnya should retain all taxes collected on its territory until 2010. Also on 30 October, Stanislav Ilyasov, who is Russian minister for Chechen affairs, told Interfax that 3.5 billion rubles (\$116.9 million) has been earmarked for reconstruction in Chechnya in 2004, and that 20,000 new jobs will be created next year. He said that more than 50 percent of Chechnya's adult population is unemployed. (Interfax)

### **AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PARTY STILL WITHOUT ALTERNATIVE HEADQUARTERS**

**30 October**

Municipal authorities in Baku still have not made alternative premises available to the opposition Musavat Party, which Mayor Hadjibala Abutalibov ordered on 24 October to vacate its current headquarters by 1 November, Musavat Deputy Chairman Vurgun Eyyub told Turan on 30 October. Eyyub said the Economic Development Ministry still has not granted written permission for Musavat to use the only suitable offices among the seven alternatives offered, and those offices are currently occupied by municipal workers who are in no hurry to vacate them. Abutalibov has threatened court action if Musavat does not leave its present premises by the 1 November deadline.

Electricity and telephone communications to those offices were cut days ago. (Turan)

### **TURKMEN PRESIDENT SIGNS ANNUAL PARDON DECREE**

**31 October**

At a Cabinet of Ministers meeting on 29 October, Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov signed his annual decree granting amnesty to 7,093 convicts in honor of the Muslim holy night that marks the end of Ramadan, the Turkmen State News Agency reported. This year, the holy night falls on 21 November. The amnesty does not cover those people convicted of involvement in the November 2002 purported coup attempt against Niyazov, who were excluded from the possibility of amnesty as part of their sentences. (RFE/RL)

### **AZERBAIJANIS PROTEST VISIT BY ARMENIAN DELEGATION**

**31 October**

An unspecified number of members of the Karabakh Liberation Organization, which advocates a military campaign to restore Azerbaijani hegemony over the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, on 31 October tried to picket the Baku hotel where an Armenian delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Ruben Shugharian was staying, but were dispersed by police. The Armenian delegation was attending a one-day meeting of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, of which Azerbaijan is currently chairman. Shugharian told Azerbaijani journalists later on 31 October that Armenia and Azerbaijan could cooperate in such areas as ecology, combating organized crime and international terrorism, and the use of water resources. (Turan)

### **KAZAKH PRESIDENT ORDERS DOUBLING OF ETHNIC KAZAKH IMMIGRATION QUOTA**

**1 November**

Nursultan Nazarbaev has signed a decree doubling the annual immigration quota for ethnic Kazakhs wanting to move to their historic homeland. Next year, the quota will be raised to 10,000 families per year. Officials have suggested raising the number of ethnic Kazakhs allowed to move to Kazakhstan as a means to counter the country's population decline since independence. The population has fallen from about 16 million to under 15 million in 2002. Nazarbaev and others have warned that Kazakhstan does not have the manpower to carry out the country's modernization plans. According to the Kazakh Agency for Migration and Demography, the country has accepted 270,000 ethnic Kazakh immigrants since independence, many more than the official quota, but those who came in beyond the quota did not receive government benefits. (khabar.kz)



## **UN SEEKS TO BOLSTER AFGHAN LEADER**

**2 November**

A high-level United Nations delegation is in Afghanistan to underline support for the country's leader, Hamid Karzai. The team - including representatives from all 15 members of the UN Security Council - has met Mr Karzai at the beginning of the trip. They are due to travel to key cities to urge powerful provincial commanders to co-operate with the government. Increasing violence and a rise in drug production are posing strong challenges to Mr Karzai's administration. Two civilians were killed on Sunday in clashes between rival militias. The woman and child died during fighting in the northern Sari Pul province, said General Abdul Sabor, a commander under Tajik warlord General Atta Mohammed. At least five fighters were also killed - two from the Tajik faction, and three from ethnic Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum's forces. There have been repeated outbreaks of factional fighting between soldiers loyal to the two leaders. The UN delegation plans to meet both commanders, to impress upon them the international community's support for President Karzai's transitional administration. There has also been a resurgence of the Taleban in the largely Pashtun south. More than 300 people, including Taleban fighters, have been killed in violence across the country since the beginning of August. The UN trip takes place after the UN Security Council unanimously voted to expand the more than 5,000-strong Nato-led peacekeeping force beyond the capital, Kabul. Mr Karzai's government has tried to curb the influence of regional warlords, but has little authority outside the capital. Ten aid workers have been killed since March and half of Afghanistan's 32 provinces have zones deemed high risk for aid organizations (BBC)

## **FOREIGN MINISTER LASHES OUT AT U.S. 'DOUBLE STANDARD'**

**3 November**

Igor Ivanov on 1 November reacted angrily to a 2 November statement by U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher in which he said the Yukos situation "raised serious questions about the rule of law in Russia, and we've noted that it sparks concerns among domestic and international investors about respect for ownership rights in Russia," RTR reported. Boucher's statement was posted on the State Department's website (<http://www.state.gov>). Ivanov said Boucher's remarks are an example of interference in the functioning of the legal system of a foreign country and another manifestation of U.S. double standards. In recent years in the United States, there have been a number of high-profile bankruptcies and some company CEOs have been arrested, but the State Department did not express any concern over these cases, Ivanov said. "Washington likes to teach others," he said. (RFE/RL)

## **GEORGIAN ELECTIONS MARRED BY CHAOS, FALSIFICATION ALLEGATIONS**

**3 November**

Voting in the 2 November Georgian parliamentary elections was marred by chaos and numerous reported violations. Up to 10 percent of voters, including opposition National Movement (EM) Chairman Mikhail Saakashvili, found their names were omitted from electoral rolls, but they were nonetheless permitted to cast ballots upon producing reliable identification in line with a ruling the previous day by Central Election Commission Chairwoman Nana Devdariani. Some polling stations in Kutaisi opened late, and remained open for an additional two hours after polls closed elsewhere so that all those waiting in line would be able to vote. Observers from the NGO Fair Elections were reportedly assaulted at polling stations in Tkibuli and Ninotsminda. Ballot-box stuffing was reported in Akhmeta, unidentified people smashed ballot boxes in Rustavi, and a ballot box was stolen in Mtskheta. Interior Minister Koba Narchemashvili characterized the atmosphere as tense and said additional police had been deployed and several persons arrested for election-related infringements. (Caucasus Press)

## **OSCE CONDEMNS MARRED GEORGIA PARLIAMENTARY POLL**

**3 November**

The weekend parliamentary election in the former Soviet republic of Georgia was marred by "spectacular" voting irregularities, international observers warned. "We all yesterday witnessed some quite spectacular failures of the electoral administration," said Bruce George, president of the parliamentary assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe which had more than 400 observers monitoring the vote. The failures "raise questions about the capacity of the parliamentary and government authorities to run a credible election," George said Monday at a news conference in the Georgian capital Tbilisi. "My colleagues and I were totally shocked at what we saw at polling stations," said Thomas Cox, head of the delegation from the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly. "Decent honest people who wanted to vote yesterday in many cases could not," Cox said. "This situation must not be allowed to happen in this country again." Georgia, a former Soviet republic in the Caucasus, voted Sunday in a parliamentary election seen as a referendum on the rule of veteran President Eduard Shevardnadze, the man blamed by many here for a decade of corruption and misrule. Early election results showed Shevardnadze's party suffering losses in the 235-seat Georgian parliament, netting 23.9 percent of the vote, down from the nearly 42 percent it won during the last parliamentary ballot in 1999. (AFP)

## **CASPIAN OIL PIPELINE PASSES TESTS -WORLD BANK**

**4 November**

The World Bank Group's oil director said on Tuesday a major Caspian Sea oil project warranted its support and had passed the environmental and social criteria. The International Financial Corp, the World Bank's private sector arm, on Tuesday approved up to \$310 million in loans for the project, which includes investment in a pipeline that stretched from Azerbaijan's capital Baku, through Tbilisi, Georgia and on to Turkey's Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. "It is fair to say that these kinds of projects entail some risks but we feel the risks have been mitigated or addressed," Rashad Kaldany, director of the group's oil, gas, mining and chemical department told Reuters. (Reuters)

## **CASPIAN STATES INK DEAL TO PROTECT THREATENED SEA**

**4 November**

Caspian states backed an initiative on Tuesday to protect their shared sea from overfishing and oil pollution which is gradually destroying the world's main habitat for caviar sturgeon. Environmental groups say wildlife in the Caspian Sea is gradually dying out -- sturgeon stocks have fallen by 90 percent since the late 1970s. Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan signed the framework agreement, put forward by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), to tackle the problem. It is hoped the agreement, which the states have yet to ratify, will lead to a reduction in the amount of sewage and industrial waste pumped into the sea. "By signing this important new treaty the Caspian states are demonstrating their firm commitment to saving the beautiful and resource-rich Caspian Sea," Iranian Vice-President Masoumeh Ebtekar said through state media. The sea is being increasingly tapped for its large oil reserves. But environmentalists want

oil companies working in the Caspian to invest in equipment which is less likely to leak. (Reuters)

## **PROTESTERS GATHER FOR GEORGIA RALLY**

**5 November**

Anti-government demonstrators in Georgia are gathering for a second day of protests after Sunday's general election. Main opposition leader Mikhail Saakashvili has told President Eduard Shevardnadze that he must resign by midday on Wednesday or concede victory. Large number of police and security forces were being deployed in the capital, Tbilisi, as protesters gathered ahead of the deadline. Mr Shevardnadze said security forces should do their utmost to prevent "destabilisation" of the situation. On Tuesday, up to 15,000 people took to the streets of the former Soviet republic to express their anger at alleged election fraud. By the time of Tuesday's protest, election officials said they had counted only half the votes - giving the lead to the pro-government bloc of Mr Shevardnadze. Speakers who addressed the crowd said the future of the ex-Soviet state was at stake. "They falsified the election," said Mr Saakashvili, whose National Movement is in second place. "We must demonstrate to the authorities that we no longer want to live under the old regime, that we want a new Georgia." "I appeal to you to defend your own votes, the dignity of your country, and the future of our children," said another opposition leader, parliament speaker Nino Burdzhnaze. And former speaker Zurab Zhvania told the crowd: "We are ready to fight to the very end. It's our last chance." Election officials say Mr Shevardnadze's For a New Georgia bloc is leading with about 25% support, the National Movement is on about 23% and the Labour Party on 15%. Ms Burdzhnaze's party, the Democrats, had a showing of 9%. Election officials say a final result should be declared later this week, although no date has been given. (BBC)

