

Central Asia

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ANALYST

BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday, December 17, 2003

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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/December 17, 2003

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The dynamics of demographic change in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union will increasingly play an important role in maintaining stability in the former Soviet Union and hence in the European continent writ large. Facing demographic pressures from China, South Asia and the Middle East, the ailing and shrinking populations of the European Union and Russia need an equalizer to stabilize the external demographic pressure, and to acquire qualified workforce to their economies and social welfare systems. If for Western Europe, this kind of status-quo is maintained by the population resources of Turkey and North Africa, the Eastern European countries, such as Russia and Ukraine will increasingly have to rely on Central Asia's population.

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

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

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

Analytical article structure:

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

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

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

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

Specifications for Field Reports:

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

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

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RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE PRESENCE IN THE CIS

Denis Trifonov

The depth of intelligence co-operation between Russia and CIS states, including the most reluctant members of this organization, has traditionally been downplayed for political reasons. Security ties, however, do exist, and are now viewed by President Putin as a key instrument of Moscow's influence in the post-Soviet states. Moscow is the leading force behind the new CIS system of intelligence coordination, and its protégés occupy senior posts in many national security services. Putin's ascent to power provided an impetus for better security ties with most CIS states. Moscow has used these connections to counteract NATO interests and Chechen funding

BACKGROUND: At the bilateral level, Russian intelligence has utilised old KGB networks and common Soviet heritage to influence threat perceptions of local leaders. Soon after the end of the USSR, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and its domestic counterpart FSB (then FSK) signed data exchange and joint operations deals with all CIS states. Russian intelligence stations were opened throughout the region, most with a remit to conduct operations against third states. In Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus, the FSB was granted powers to spy against Russian nationals suspected of breaching the official secrets act.

Belarus is Russia's closest intelligence ally. The SVR Academy trains Belarusian foreign intelligence operatives; the SVR is believed to have actively used Belarusian diplomatic facilities abroad as cover for its agents. President Lukashenka is regularly briefed by Russian security chiefs. The Belarusian KGB co-ordinates its operations in the West with the SVR and Russian defense intelligence GRU. Less visible but also close has been Moscow's intelligence co-operation with Ukrainian and Kazakh security services. The FSB and the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) are believed to have collaborated against NATO interests in Ukraine and abroad. Since 2000, there has been a renewed emphasis on joint operations against criminal and terrorist groups. The FSB and the Kazakh Committee of National Security (KNB) are known to have exchanged data on Islamic religious groups in Central Asia and the Middle East. The SVR is also likely to have used the KNB's relationship with Turkish special services to spy on Ankara – suspected by Moscow of aiding Chechen separatists. Since Vladimir Putin came to power, relations between Russian and Uzbek, Turkmen and Georgian intelligence agencies are believed to have improved. Russian sources indicate that the latter three might have helped the SVR to block Chechen funds coming in from the Middle East. Putin's ascent to power has also provided impetus for better security ties with Moldova and Azerbaijan.

At the multi-lateral level, Russian intelligence has increasingly made use of the CIS institutional framework to assert its influence in the post-Soviet area. The main forum for Moscow-led security co-operation is the annual conference of the CIS intelligence chiefs convened by the FSB. The conference has a permanent coordinating secretariat based in the FSB headquarters in Moscow. The agenda of the multi-

lateral consultations has markedly widened since 2000, and now includes penetration of militant Islam into the region, drug trafficking, government data protection and separatism. The FSB and its CIS counterparts have also set up a joint intelligence database that stores information on organized crime and terrorism.

IMPLICATIONS: In many CIS states, the intelligence communities are the most pro-Russian elements of the national governments and an important channel of Moscow's influence. This is not a coincidence. Structure, recruitment and training principles of many national security services closely resemble those of the Soviet-era republican KGB directorates. However, the resources and capabilities of local KGBs during the Soviet period had been limited. So were the abilities of the newly formed intelligence agencies in the CIS to defend local regimes that in the early 1990s were fragile. Russia was willing to help with intelligence information, training and equipment; it found it relatively easy to talk to former KGB officials and used former ties and intelligence assistance as an anchor. On the Russian side, co-operation is not only interest- but also value-based. Many in the SVR and the FSB are personally committed to raising Moscow's profile in the region. Newly independent states are viewed by the intelligence personnel as less than sovereign, and much effort has gone into defeating local political forces that are nationalist and anti-Russian.

With regard to its intelligence priorities, Russia has had and is likely to retain two main objectives: combating terrorism and furthering its economic interests. Since the beginning of the second Chechen campaign in 1999, both the SVR and the FSB have used their influence to fight Islamic militants in Central Asia and clamp down on Chechen diasporas in Georgia and Azerbaijan. In 1999, when the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan invaded the Kyrgyz region of Batken, the SVR played a role in regional efforts to defeat the insurgents. The FSB and some of its CIS partners have conducted several joint operations in Chechnya, where it is highly likely that the Jordanian-born warlord Khattab was poisoned by an Arab agent run by the security service of one of the Central Asian states. At the multilateral level, Russia is increasingly working through the CIS Anti-Terrorist Centre. The ATC is headed by the FSB's General Boris Mylnikov, and Russia pays 50% of its budget. The original plan was to

use it as a think-tank, but it has gradually assumed other functions, now boasting a field office in Bishkek tasked with planning joint operations and holding anti-terrorist exercises.

On the economic front, the SVR and FSB maintain close links to and promote the interests of Russia's two leading energy companies – Gazprom and Lukoil. The Central Asian states with hydrocarbon reserves continue to rely on the Russian-owned pipeline system. Moscow earns substantial trans-shipment fees and views as a security threat local projects to seek alternative transport routes. Against this backdrop, the SVR in particular has been instrumental in Russian attempts to dominate 'pipeline politics' in Central Asia.

CONCLUSIONS: The strength of Russian intelligence agencies lies in their ability to exploit the common KGB

heritage shared by local security officers, and the 'insecurity complex', as well as lack of legitimacy, of many CIS regimes. Given that, Russian intelligence agencies are likely to retain their grip on the post-Soviet states for many years to come. Moscow is the leading force behind the new CIS system of intelligence coordination, and its protégés occupy senior posts in many national security services. While this situation may somewhat change as serving security officers retire and are replaced by successors without close ties to the KGB, this is not necessarily the most probable scenario.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Denis Trifonov (BA, MSc Oxon) does research in International Relations at Lincoln College Oxford. He teaches international history and politics, and works as a Russia/CIS analyst for several political risks consultancies.

KAZAKHSTAN'S JUDICIAL SYSTEM FALLS SHORT OF WESTERN EXPECTATIONS

"My militia protects me" was one of the common phrases proudly uttered by Soviet citizens in the past. Ironically, in the public eye of post-Soviet Kazakhstan, a uniformed guardian of law and order is more of an embodiment of all evil associated with lawlessness, corruption and bribery in judicial system, rather than a symbol of justice.

A survey published not long ago by the independent newspaper "Soz" showed that most residents of Kazakhstan avoid any contact with the police and, more often than not, try to settle their legal problems out of court. The profound mistrust towards law enforcement bodies among the population can be partly attributed to frequent press reports about unsubstantiated detentions, beatings of detainees in police cells and crooked judges who send innocent people to prison. But judges themselves are increasingly realizing that lawlessness in prisons and courtrooms have already grown out of all proportions.

As the most flagrant manifestation of this crisis, the press cites the self-mutilation of 24 inmates of a prison in Astana a few weeks ago protesting inhumane treatment, humiliation and beatings. Even the government-controlled TV channel "Khabar" went out of its usual way of "selective reporting" and showed the images of the bleeding convicts taken to a prison hospital, who had knifed themselves in the stomach. The prison administration said that the wounds did not threaten the lives of the prisoners and refrained from further comments.

At a recent seminar held by the British Foreign Office and the International Association of Lawyers in Almaty, it was pointed out that judges and prosecutors have a key role to play in preventing torture in detention centers. The effectiveness of combating police violations and abuses could be heightened by a combined

application of international and national laws. Deputy Justice minister Sabyrzhan Bekbosynov thinks that Kazakhstan made a major step towards rooting out tortures by ratifying the UN Convention against Torture in 1998. He considers that Kazakhstan has a strong political will to humanize the penal legislation. Bekbosynov said that the newly created department of social protection, created at the Ministry of Justice to respond to complaints coming in from citizens subjected to violations, has received 247 complaints within a few months. The deputy director of the International Human Rights Bureau in Kazakhstan Zhemis Turmagambetova says that seminars based on theory and discussions around terminological definitions of tortures are not productive in practical terms.

Experts believe that in the majority of cases, detainees are subjected to torture and beatings during pre-trial detention or interrogation in order to squeeze out a "confession" from a suspect. But only in cases of exceptional brutality do some torturers in police uniforms stand trial. More than that, the current system of promotion in police ranks, based on the rate of "unraveled" criminal cases, encourage policemen to resort to Gestapo-like methods to make detainees confess to crimes they never committed.

Suicide attempts in prisons of Kazakhstan have become frequent over the last two years. Harsh prison conditions and abuses by police are only a visible tip of the problem on the surface, which makes a part of the general disrespect for human rights pervading all spheres of public life. According to legal experts and human rights activists, this dismal state of things cannot be changed in a positive way unless the whole of the judicial system is reformed from top to bottom.

Political parties, non-governmental organizations, and officials from the Supreme Court and Prosecutor-General's Office, converged on December 8 at a round table to discuss ways of reforming the judicial system. Despite divergences of views, they all recognized the necessity of getting all democratic strata involved into the process. A civilized justice system, it was stressed by all participants of the discussion, is not imaginable without establishing public control over judicial power. But further discussions revealed the clash of interests in power-sharing between the judges and prosecutors. Under the current law, prosecutors are empowered to control the course of an investigation and to overrule a court decision. Amassing too much power in one hand, according to the Association of Judges, leaves loopholes for abuses.

A representative of the Prosecutor-General's Office reacted calmly to such remarks, saying that important issues in the judicial system would be considered soon by the Constitutional Council, and not at a round table. In his turn he criticized the practice, applied by the Supreme Court and regional courts, of sending back cases to lower courts. He said that judges in lower courts depend very much on the chairman of the court.

This long-debated issue seems to be the core of the reform of the judicial system in Kazakhstan. Even pro-government parties like "Otan" put up a demand that judges, at least at district levels, should be elected by residents, and not appointed by officials at the top. The profession of a judge is one of the highest paid in Kazakhstan. Recently the government came up with a proposal to parliament to further raise the salaries of judges. But the majority of parliamentarians do not believe that this will help eradicate corruption among judges.

Marat Yemukanov

KAZAKHSTAN'S DRAFT MEDIA LAW A SETBACK FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Olivia Allison

Two prominent journalists' organizations withdrew Dec. 9 from the parliamentary working group on Kazakhstan's draft media law, a move that signaled their increasing frustration with the negotiation process. Internews Kazakhstan and the International Foundation for the Protection of Speech Adil Soz issued a public statement calling the working group "unacceptable and hopeless" and said they would take "no responsibility over the final result." The organizations said the law adopted by the parliamentary working group will be "contradictory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and substantially narrowing the legal framework of freedom of expression and media business in Kazakhstan."

BACKGROUND: Media laws were passed in 1991 and 1999, and the latter law was amended in 2001. The Constitution and each media law theoretically guarantee freedom of speech and expression and prohibit censorship, but lawyers, human rights organizations and press freedom/media groups cite a worsening trend for freedom of speech since the 1991 law. Oversight bodies and registration procedures have increased, and prohibitions of the "abuse of freedom," as well as other limitations on press freedom, remain in the law.

The most important areas of change in the draft law are in licensing/registration, accreditation, language, editorial board limitations and access to information. The "authorized body" mentioned repeatedly in the law is also contentious, as the draft gives it significant power without defining it. The "authorized body on mass media affairs" is defined as a "central executive body which fulfills state regulation of mass-media activity and information agencies of the Republic of Kazakhstan," part of the Ministry of Information. Major contentious areas include registration, licensing, technical requirements, and language.

The authorized body has increased control of registration, which is required for all media companies. Under the 1991 law, this was the Ministry of Justice's responsibility, but the 1999 law and the draft law give the authorized body this authority. The 1991 and 1999 laws gave only courts and owners the ability to suspend publication or broadcast, but in the 2001 amendment to the 1999 law, the registering body was given power to revoke its decision to register a media body (outside the court). The draft law worsens the situation, giving the authorized body almost unlimited power for suspending or revoking registration (Article 8).

Language detailing the licensing process is contradictory. Licensing is required for all electronic media, but the 1991 and 1999 laws do not specifically mention the licensing process. Licensing was governed by the 1995 presidential decree "On Licensing," giving the Ministry of Transport and Communications, responsibility for granting licenses. The draft law contains several contradictions in defining the licensing body. Article 25 simultaneously gives licensing

responsibilities to the authorized body and then to the Kazakh government, contradicting the aforementioned law on licensing, while Article 8(4) gives this responsibility to a commission for competitive licensing. Section 26 is contradictory on who can suspend licenses, at once granting this ability to both the authorized body and to the courts.

The draft law (Article 22) includes restrictions on technical equipments radio and TV broadcasters must use, which will create a monopoly on antennas for the company KazTeleRadio, an Internews analysis wrote.

The 1991 law's Article 3 states that media programming and publications can be produced in the state language and in other languages. The 1999 law (Article 3) requires the state language, Kazakh, to receive equal broadcasting volume as other languages. The draft law requires that Kazakh-language programming be "evenly distributed."

In addition, the draft law, like the 1999 law, does not prohibit monopolies or obstruction of professional journalistic activity. The 1991 law forbade not only monopolies (Article 7) but also the obstruction of professional journalistic activity, punishable by law (Article 39).

IMPLICATIONS: The negative implications of the draft law far outnumber the positive, as the draft law retains most of the negative introductions of the 1999 law and introduces other problematic rules.

The general reliance on the authorized body is extremely problematic, as the body is not independent. The draft law is significantly worse, giving the authorized body the power to suspend or terminate broadcasting and publication, whereas this right was only given to courts earlier.

Although a stated purpose of the new law is to simplify the registration process, this process has become more confusing, especially for electronic media. Electronic media, according to the draft law, will be going to the same authorized body two separate times: once for registration and another time for licensing. Internews Kazakhstan's lawyer Sergei Vlasenko said the more times the media returns to this authorized body, the more the body has the opportunity to restrict the media. The authorized body's has total control of

all elements of opening and closing media via licensing and registration.

The draft law continues the trend of decreasing editorial independence. Article 9 of the draft law prohibits foreigners and stateless people from being editors of a media body. Journalists and lawyers claim this provision is directed at the editorial staff of the *Respublika* organization's newspaper. The newspaper's editor is Russian citizen Irina Petrushova, currently living in Russia. The newspaper, now published under the name *Assandi Times*, has been shut down three times and was the subject of several attacks last year. But, according to the two organizations' joint statement, the draft law will no longer include other articles governing media owners and founders. Earlier the law gave the owner full access to documents of the editorial staff; it is unclear if this will remain in the law.

The provisions on languages and retransmitting are financially problematic for smaller TV and radio stations. Both ultimately require stations to increase original programming, which is expensive. Furthermore, original programming is generally of lower quality than Russian programming, so it receives lower ratings and consequently brings less money from advertising. The article on languages does not give a time period during which programming should be uniformly distributed; this period could be 24 hours or over a week. Furthermore, technical restrictions will

create a monopolistic environment and make broadcasting more expensive.

The draft law lacks a clear-cut range of sanctions and a mention of whether there will be registration fees. Sanctions should be detailed, beginning with light punishments and ending with limits on fines for moral compensation. Appeals procedures also require further detail in the law. One improvement is that only courts can revoke individual journalists' accreditation, whereas this was in the authorized body's power in the 1999 law. Still, accreditation is not required to work as a journalist.

CONCLUSIONS: There is no concrete information on what changes will be made to the final draft before it is considered formally in Parliament. The draft currently under consideration is the outcome of months of negotiations with media, and the Ministry of Information claims it has accepted most changes journalists suggested. However, journalist groups have claimed the ministry only accepted those changes which were inconsequential to the regulatory purpose of the law. Other groups worry that more restrictive clauses will be added to the law later, when it is considered by Parliament. Vlasenko said, "This law is bad, but the government can do much worse."

AUTHOR'S BIO: Olivia Allison is currently conducting research in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

THE 1990S END IN AZERBAIJAN, AS THE NATION MOURNS ITS PATRIARCH

On December 15, by laying flowers at the grave of their veteran leader Heydar Aliyev, the people of Azerbaijan bid farewell to a long and complicated chapter of the nation's history. Not that Aliyev's death in Cleveland, Ohio, came as a surprise: on the contrary, it had been repeatedly rumored before and the 80-year old Aliyev had suffered serious health problems in the past few months. Yet for many Azerbaijanis, the departure of Heydar Aliyev, once one of the USSR's most powerful men and later Azerbaijan's strong-handed leader, who ruled the country for over three decades totally, is a turning point in the country's road to independence and the end of an era. In fact, the death of Aliyev, a patriarch of the region, is in a sense ending the 90s in Azerbaijan and in the Caucasus. With the Georgian patriarchal ex-President Eduard Shevardnadze ousted from office by a younger generation of leaders, Ilham Aliyev succeeding his father Heydar in Azerbaijan, and Russia ruled by younger, more dynamic Vladimir Putin, the region faces a new political dynamic.

For the moment, however, as President Ilham Aliyev mourns the loss of his father and mentor, Heydar, his Russian counterpart Putin, Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer accompanied by

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the top military brass as well as the Ukrainian and Kazakh presidents, Leonid Kuchma and Nursultan Nazarbaev, respectively, joined him at the funeral. Also present were Georgia's past, present and (likely) future presidents Eduard Shevardnadze, Nino Burjanadze and Mikheil Saakashvili along with the leader of the separatist region of Ajaria – Aslan Abashidze. Bitter enemies in domestic politics, they represent all of Georgia in paying tribute to the memory of Azerbaijan's Heydar Aliyev.

This was in stark contrast to the virtual absence of high-level Americans and West Europeans. The U.S. delegation was led not by the friend of the late President - Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, but by Brent Scowcroft, a distinguished figure with no official standing. This is unfortunate, because as a leader who made the pro-Western orientation a cornerstone of his presidency, turned Azerbaijan into one of America's most reliable partners and passed away in a Mid-Western hospital, Heydar Aliyev deserved greater attention from his Western friends. The arrival of Kansas Senator Sam Brownback added much-needed weight to the American delegation, though a difference in presence between the western partners on one

hand and regional delegations, including those from Azerbaijan's uneasy neighbors Iran and Russia on the other, could hardly escape thousands participating in the memorial service.

Does this matter? At the time, when America struggles for "hearts and minds", it might. In Azerbaijan, attending weddings and funerals is among the most important social functions. Ignoring them is a show of ultimate disrespect. Attendance at Heydar Aliyev's funeral may be seen as a measure of attitude towards the nation and the region as a whole. This is even more so with Aliyev's son Ilham standing at the helm of the government.

Consider this: in 1993, Turkish President Turgut Ozal, a prominent and a strong leader, passed away. He was close with President George Bush, whom he counted among his personal friends, and was instrumental in helping the U.S. with the Gulf War. Many Turks expected George Bush to attend the funeral of a friend and a staunch ally. Bush never came. Ten years passed. Much has changed, but the disappointment is still remembered.

Elin Suleymanov

HEIGHTENED GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION OVER THE CAUCASUS?

Fariz Ismailzade

Following the elections in Azerbaijan and Georgia and the subsequent changes in the leadership of the two countries, Russia and the U.S. seem to be engaging in a new competition over the region. Newly elected President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan seems to temporarily satisfy both the U.S. and Russian interests and will strive to maintain a balance of power, but Shevardnadze's resignation weakened Russia's position in Georgia and thus revived Moscow's fears of losing control over the region. The increasing U.S. military presence in the region, as indicated by Donald Rumsfeld's visit to the region, adds extra fuel to this fire, threatening the regional Azeri-Georgian energy projects and the resolution of regional conflicts.

BACKGROUND: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and the United States have engaged in a mixture of geopolitical competition and cooperation in the Caucasus region. Considering the region as its own backyard, Russia looked with suspicion to American efforts to engage the newly independent countries of the Caucasus into western military, political and economic institutions. The U.S. has in its turn gradually engaged the region through energy projects, military cooperation and political alliances. The resulting competition has impeded the solution of regional ethnic conflicts and has delayed the construction of main export pipelines for oil and gas.

The recent parliamentary elections in Georgia and the ensuing regime change has raised Russian fears about losing influence over the region, as Moscow regards the new regime in Tbilisi as "pro-Western technocrats." This in turn led to additional and open Russian support for the separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as to the maverick Ajarian regional leader Aslan Abashidze – thus blackmailing the new Georgian government and questioning the territorial integrity of Georgia.

In Azerbaijan, developments took a different turn, as President Heydar Aliyev's son Ilham was elected to the presidency on October 15 and received the endorsement of both Moscow and Washington. Major regional players, including Turkey, seemed to agree on the candidacy of Ilham Aliyev as the most optimal choice for their respective national interests. The U.S. hoped that the younger Aliyev would maintain the political stability in the country but accelerate the economic and energy projects started by his father. Russia, in its turn, hoped that Ilham Aliyev would be easier to influence and that the Moscow-educated President would soon follow pro-Russian policies in the region.

The recent visit of U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to Azerbaijan and Georgia, and subsequent talks about the possible opening of U.S. mobile military bases in Azerbaijan, might put an end to this fragile balance of influence. Azerbaijan is an active member of the U.S.-led anti-terror coalition, and the U.S. seeks new opportunities to further increase its military and security presence in the country.

Russia's ambassador to Azerbaijan Nikolay Ryabov immediately reacted to the visit by holding a press conference the next day and expressing Moscow's complete objection to any foreign military presence in the region. Azerbaijani Defense Minister Safar Abiyev, in his turn, stated in Moscow that U.S. military bases in Azerbaijan are "not ruled out." U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Mark Grossman echoed this statement, saying that the U.S. government has made an initial decision to relocate its military bases from Germany to the countries in Eastern Europe, including republics of the former Soviet Union. He also tried to downplay Russian fears by saying that "these relocations are done to change the spirit of the Cold War."

IMPLICATIONS: The previous leadership of Azerbaijan and Georgia had established a relative balance of power in the Caucasus. With them gone, geopolitical competition between Russia and the U.S. risks increasing. Russia seems to utilize several traditional mechanisms in order to check a further increase of U.S. influence in the region, including support for ethnic separatism and economic pressures.

In Azerbaijan, Russia is more likely to turn to economic factors. Approximately two million Azeris live and work in Russia, and their legal status remains vague. Should the Azerbaijani government allow U.S. military bases in the country, Russia might threaten to deport those Azeris, thus breeding socio-economic tensions in Azerbaijan due to the increase in the numbers of unemployed people and a loss of income. At the same time, pressures on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, currently under construction and expected to be completed by 2005, will increase. Azerbaijani newspapers have reported of Russian sabotage threats to the pipelines, and Azerbaijan's Minister of National Security Namik Abbasov, two weeks ago ordered an increase of security measures in the pipeline areas.

In Georgia, Russia seems to focus on the Ajaria card, implicitly threatening the new Georgian government. Nino Burjanadze, interim President of Georgia, traveled to Ajaria to convince the regional leader Aslan Abashidze to recognize the new Georgia government, but failed to do so. On the other hand, Russia is also likely to use its influence over the

peace process in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and could thereby obstruct, as it has done before, a final solution. Moscow could hinder the work of the OSCE Minsk group and pressure Armenia away from making concessions to Azerbaijan. The recent visit of the Minsk group's co-chairs to the region brought no new proposals and ideas and further strengthened the impression among the general public that the co-chairs are neither able nor willing to solve the conflict. Russia uses this avenue purely for the purposes of controlling the peace process. With these circumstances, it is likely that the solution of the Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts will be delayed for several more years, while the likelihood of separatism in Ajaria will increase. This will add further political instability to already war-torn and fragmented Georgia.

CONCLUSIONS: With the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the integration of Azerbaijan and Georgia into the Western markets will be irreversible. At the same time, the continued war on terror pushes the U.S. to increase its security and military presence in the Caucasus region. This will lead to more military cooperation between

the U.S. and Azerbaijan and Georgia. Russia, in its turn, is disposed to preventing this from happening, and under these circumstances the security of the regional energy projects could come under serious threat. The new Azerbaijani and Georgian leadership will need urgent Western, primarily American, political and economic support to overcome and withstand Russian pressures. Meanwhile, it is imperative that the West push for the solution of regional conflicts, as they remain a useful and effective tool in the hands of Moscow policy-makers to pressure the Caucasian republics.

Revived geo-political competition will not bring positive changes to the region. Local governments could, to avoid this, pursue a policy of "balance of powers" and the outside powers should avoid making radical demands on the local leaders at the expense of other powers. Otherwise, the current fragile stability in the region could get out of control, serving neither the national interest of the U.S. or Russia.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Fariz Ismailzade is a freelance writer on Caucasus geopolitics and economics based in Baku. He holds a master's degree from Washington University in St. Louis.

THE DESTRUCTION OF KASHGAR

Beijing is in the throws of inflicting wanton destruction on one of the most ancient cities of the Silk Road. Interpreted by most Uyghurs as a move to further dilute the Muslim 'minority' influence in Southern Xinjiang, Kashgar's heritage and ancient charm is undergoing a facelift such that it will render it unrecognizable from the tranquil scenes that were televised only a month ago by the very same Chinese government that is now intent on its destruction.

It is 9 p.m. in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, North West China. It is the first of July 2003. Tuning into CCTV 9's regular Travelogue program, part of the English language, government-run TV channel broadcast around the world, the camera zooms in on a Chinese presenter. Behind her is an ancient city "suspended in time". Travel clichés tripping off her tongue, she tells the world "Kashgar is isolated from the rest of the world." Extolling its calm amid the "hustle and bustle of 21st century life," Kashgar is an "island of solitude," most of whose houses are "more than centuries old."

Here she proclaims, "Islam is central to life." "2-3,000 male Muslims visit the Id Kah Mosque every day and 10,000 every Friday." "In this haven of peace and quietude, life continues much as it has for centuries, much as it has for centuries, unhurried and disturbed by the rush and chaos of 21st century life."

Some of her claims to isolation might well have been true 15 years ago when it took 3 days and nights to reach the remote oasis before the railway, completed two years ago brought 5,000 Chinese migrants into the area each week. They might have

been partly true before the centre of the city became a Chinese enclave of faceless, white-tiled cubicles, and the country lanes were widened and city walls felled to accommodate six lanes of traffic. The boast about Islam might also once have been true before the 1949 'peaceful liberation' of Xinjiang by an atheist revolution and current laws which forbid participation in religion by government workers, students and those under 18.

But all claims to historical and cultural longevity were soundly trounced barely a month after the flowery rhetoric.

It is 5 p.m. on July 26th. A week ago today, four bulldozers as massive and unwieldy as prehistoric dinosaurs advanced on Nur Beshe Road, a picturesque alley bordering the mosque. A week later, with each movement of the caterpillar tracks, clouds of centuries-old talcum-powder dust are thrown into the ancient air where once mud-walled antiquity stood.

Government posters and plans deck remaining street walls promising at least two more months of destruction before Id Kah, will stand as the lone remnant of that veritable "island of culture."

Shocked and frightened victims of the destruction, their hair greying by the minute from the dust, stand in a silent row, their past and their future collapsing decisively and irreparably with each blow of the bulldozer's shovel. Most too terrified to comment hurried away when questioned. "There are spies everywhere paid to keep us quiet," said an elderly man under his breath as he made a hasty departure. Some wanting to talk in back alleys described their "despair" and "heartbreak" at seeing generations of

family history crushed. Others scrabbling in the rubble to salvage building materials for the homes they are forced to build on government land 5 kilometres away, had had livelihoods in the town and compensation had been meager and non-negotiable.

Most Uyghurs understood the wanton destruction ordered by the government as a way to rid the city centre of their presence. "Once we are moved to the edge of town, the Chinese can claim our city completely," said an old man who felt he had nothing to lose by speaking out. "They want to break us completely, our communities and our spirit," he said. "They steal our land, make us pay rent and then take it from us completely," he said referring to the Chinese law that renders all land state property and enables its reclamation at any time. Several people spoke of those who had died recently in connection with the demolition. Some had been simply defending their homes, some died of heart-related stress.

Already a wall is going up around a small enclave of old city to be sanitized for posterity. Already tour groups pay to enter and already residents have been ordered to sit on their doorsteps looking "ethnic" and look busy doing local crafts.

By winter another chapter in China's "reconstruction" will be over. Another chapter in her proudly trumpeted 5,000 year history would have been ground into the dust. Another ethnic group would have been assigned to the vagaries of quaint ethnic status. Future generations may live to regret the decision, but by then it will be too late.

Ruth Ingram

HOW DEMOGRAPHICS WILL IMPACT GEOPOLITICS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Abraham Cohen

The dynamics of demographic change in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union will increasingly play an important role in maintaining stability in the former Soviet Union and hence in the European continent writ large. Facing demographic pressures from China, South Asia and the Middle East, the ailing and shrinking populations of the European Union and Russia need an equalizer to stabilize the external demographic pressure, and to acquire qualified workforce to their economies and social welfare systems. If for Western Europe, this kind of status-quo is maintained by the population resources of Turkey and North Africa, the Eastern European countries, such as Russia and Ukraine will increasingly have to rely on Central Asia's population.

BACKGROUND: Since the mid-1970s, countries in both Eastern and Western Europe as well as the Slavic republics of the former USSR (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) have experienced a steady and accelerating decline in population, leading to aging and a shortage of workforce, especially in low paid and unqualified branches of the economy, as well as increasingly, problems with conscripts to military service. In Western Europe, this led to the migration to Europe of more than fifteen million immigrants, mainly from Turkey, francophone Arab countries and Eastern European countries. Still, the enlarged European Union of 25 members and 350 million people will be in need of millions of new workforce in coming decade in order to sustain the system of social welfare and pensions. It will also be of critical importance to the EU and U.S. national security interests to maintain at least status-quo and stability along the borders of the former Soviet Union, experiencing an enormous demographic pressure by the Chinese population of 1.3 billion, India's over 1 billion, and 350 million Muslims in the countries of South Asia and the Middle East. Most vulnerable in this regard is Russia. In 1992, the Russian Federation was home to 148 million inhabitants, which has shrunk to 145 million in 2003 in spite of in-migration of more than 9 million immigrants from other republics of the former USSR in the 1990s. In contrast, the Chinese population is increasing by 16-18 millions a year, and India's by more than 20 millions. This contrast is even more striking, if one bears in mind that Pakistan today has a larger population than Russia, and compares to Moscow by being a member of the nuclear weapons club. Russian statistics suggest that by 2030, its population will decrease just to 121 million. Similarly, Ukraine presently has 47 million inhabitants, but the projected figure for 2030 is 38 million. The vast landmasses of the Russian Far East and Siberia, but also Central Russian regions like Ivanovo, Kostroma and others, as well as Ukraine, will increasingly need workforce to keep operating their economies, and even get conscripts to their armies.

By contrast, Central Asian republics have a positive trend of population growth. Educated by secular European standards of the former USSR, they might provide a midterm solution (up to 2025-2030) to the demographic problems and border

security of the former USSR and OSCE area, by bringing 60 to 80 million relatively young, modern educated citizens to this demographic equation.

IMPLICATIONS: Of the five Central Asian republics, only three will have population growth in the period up to 2030: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan, according to recent study by the U.S. Population Reference Bureau, will have just 12 million in 2030, down from 14.9 million today. Turkmenistan, due to the reportedly very high percentage of drug addiction among the male population, which is spreading to the female population, will be unlikely to produce any substantial change of the population from today's 4.7 million. The current policy, amounting to a total destruction of the national education system, is also unlikely to leave a significant niche for Turkmen citizens in the future competitive job markets of unified Europe, or for that matter of Russia.

In contrast, Tajikistan's population could increase from the current 6.6 million to 10.5 million by 2030; Kyrgyzstan's from 5 million to 7.3 million; and Uzbekistan's from 26 million to 40.2 million. The combined population of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan of 55-60 million can therefore be expected to make a real difference in achieving demographic stability in Russia and Ukraine, and a minor role in other European countries. This can play a critically important role in maintaining the status-quo of external borders of the OSCE area, the 'wider' Euro-Atlantic Home from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as advocated by some politicians in the late 1980s.

The negative demographic tendencies in Russia, and the realization at the highest levels that it will be impossible to reverse it by government actions, have already led the Russian defense ministry to call on citizens of CIS countries to join the Russian military in exchange for higher pay and speeded up approval of citizenship of the Russian Federation.

CONCLUSIONS: Demographics matter in the dynamic changes in a volatile world order. Long-standing understandings of threats and challenges to national security are being re-evaluated, but the basic factors of geostrategic stability remain, such as the integrity of strategic borders and

states' ability to run their national economies and to ensure the defense of their national territories. In all these aspects, population is of critical importance. The United States and the enlarged European Union would not welcome the prospect of having a common border with China or with unstable and volatile countries of South Asia and the Middle East, some empowered by Russian military hardware and nuclear know-how – whether in these countries or in the Ural mountains. The population potential of Central Asia, formed by the experience of being part of the European and Soviet heritage, could prove to be a key resource in maintaining the

current status-quo in the external borders of the OSCE member countries for the coming 20-25 years. However, after this period, even the population of Central Asian republics is likely to follow the European demographic trend of low birth rates and a stagnation of population growth. The demographic potential of Central Asia is likely to be an important and useful resource in maintaining strategic stability in Eurasia in the coming three decades.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Abraham Cohen is a freelance journalist based in Bloomington, Indiana, specializing in Central Asian and Middle Eastern Affairs.

TURKMENISTAN'S FAILED COUP: A YEAR AFTER

The unprecedented events of November 25, 2002 turned out to be the onset of repressions in Turkmenistan and criticisms of the regime from abroad. As such, the failed coup in Turkmenistan appears to be a justification for continuous restrictive measures, the passing of new laws, constitutional amendments and constant reshuffling in the government. Yet the consolidation of the Turkmen opposition and coherent measures taken by international community are the sole hope regarding the restive situation in Turkmenistan.

This November 25th, 2003 marked the first anniversary of the failed assassination attempt on President Saparmurat Niyazov's life. On this date a year ago, gunfire was opened on Niyazov's motorcade with the purpose of physically removing him from his post. Whether this attack was a genuine incident or allegedly staged or fabricated by the government still remains a subject for comprehensive investigation. However, several former state officials such as Deputy-Prime Minister Boris Shikmuradov and Ambassador to Turkey Nurmukhamed Khanamov were declared the masterminds behind the plot. As a result, authorities' restrictive measures such as a law on treason, the re-imposition of exit visa regulations, and the cancellation of dual citizenship followed the failed coup.

On 27-29 September 2003, with the purpose of creating a common strategy toward the political crisis in Turkmenistan, different groups of Turkmen opposition-in-exile gathered in Prague, Czech Republic, and created a Union of Democratic Forces of Turkmenistan against Niyazov's regime. As their main political platform, the opposition leaders counted the establishing of parliamentary democracy, building a multiparty system, and the restoration of human rights in Turkmenistan. Commenting on the opposition union, Vitalii Ponomarev, director of the Central Asia Program at

Memorial Human Rights Center in Moscow said, "I think there is a real chance (one cannot give a 100 percent guarantee) that we might not have to wait as long as five years for that change to come." Thus, previously divided fractions united their forces to topple the regime with new strategies.

Last Friday, commenting on Turkmen opposition members in exile, and about the reported plotters of the coup attempt, President Niyazov called them "cowards and the wicked" and asked them "to come home for a fair trial." "If these thieves, terrorists and fugitives have courage, let them come and answer to the law and then set up a party in Turkmenistan. If they wish let them choose any lawyer from abroad. But they, Avdy Kuliyeve, Yklymovs, Orazov, Khanamov and others, want to receive money from special funds and keep casting aspersion on their country", said Niyazov (Turkmenistan.ru). In the meantime, the president carried out new reshufflings in the government. According to the OSI Turkmenistan Project report, Niyazov fired the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Construction, and the Minister of Water Economy, and appointed two new deputy premiers.

Within this context, the President two weeks ago signed a new law on public associations that receive foreign grants from outer sources. According to this law, all foreign aid, grants coming to NGOs, religious organizations and other associations should be registered with the Ministry of Justice. The representative agencies of donor organizations in Ashgabat reacted submissively. On October 21, the President signed another piece of legislation regulating the activities of religious organizations and freedom of religion. As it stipulates, the activity of unregistered religious organizations will be considered under the Criminal Code of Turkmenistan. Since the establishment of any

association requires to be registered, "registration with the Justice Ministry requires 500 adult citizens living inside the country," reports OSI Turkmenistan Project.

As such, the level of restrictions over religious freedom has been on the rise since last year's failed coup. In addition to putting pressure on and closing the Baptist Church, the authorities are not constraining themselves from totally controlling Turkmen mosques. As Forum 18, a group that monitors religious freedom in the former Soviet Union reports, "the State Security Ministry (ex-KGB) has closed down a mosque for not putting the Ruhnama (Book of the Soul), President Saparmurat Niyazov's spiritual writings, on the same stand as the Koran during Friday prayers to be filmed for TV."

These latest regulations over religious freedom and human rights violations related to failed coup reflected upon criticisms abroad. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights passed the first resolution condemning the human rights violations in Turkmenistan. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) produced its preliminary and starting dossier on Turkmenistan, particularly on the case of assassination attempt and its implications. The United States expressed its concerns about the situation and urged Turkmenistan to make amendments to the latest laws on religious freedom. As such, there is concern that the new law can deter the already inert activities of NGOs in the country.

Within this context, the increasing international pressure over Turkmenistan remains the sole hope for bringing change to the dictatorial regime while the united opposition in exile remains too feeble to exert direct influence in the country.

Chemen Durdiyeva

NEWS BITES

RUSSIA SCOLDS GEORGIA OVER BEREZOVSKY'S RECENT VISIT TO TBILISI

4 December

Georgian ambassador in Moscow Zurab Abashidze was invited to the Russian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday to receive the note relative to Boris Berezovsky's visit to Georgia, the Press and Information Board of the Russian Foreign Ministry says in the communique. The note says that, according to information from the press centre of the Georgian State Department for State Border Protection, Boris Berezovsky arrived in Tbilisi on the night between December 2 and 3. "Georgia should well know that the person is on international search by the Interpol", reads the note. It also says that Georgian representatives officially confirm that Berezovsky had presented another man's identity papers with the Georgian visa issued in London. (RIA-Novosti)

GEORGIAN EMBASSY IN LONDON SAYS HAS NOT ISSUED VISA TO BEREZOVSKY

4 December

The Georgian Embassy in London has not issue entry visas to Georgia to either Boris Berezovsky or Platon Elenin. "We did not give a visa to a certain Platon Elenin," a spokesman for the Georgian Embassy in London has reported, "nor did the Embassy receive such an application." The head of the press service Georgian Border Guards Department, Shalva Londaridze, has said that Berezovsky produced to the frontier guards documents issued for Platon Elenin with a Georgian visa stamped in London. "He could have got a visa upon his arrival in the country, which can be done by any foreigner at the border," explained the Georgian Embassy in London. The origin of the document used by Berezovsky is not yet known. Commenting on his lightning visit to Georgia on the Ekho Moskvyy radio station on Wednesday, Berezovsky said that the British authorities "issued [him] documents for different names," including Platon Elenin. Shalva Londaridze confirmed this and said that the Russian entrepreneur "had the British passport issued in July 2003." At that time, the legal actions regarding Berezovsky's extradition to Russia were not complete. Berezovsky was granted political asylum in Great Britain in September 2003. The Home Office said it did not issue the document to Boris Berezovsky under another name. The Home Office is not in the habit of issuing several passports or any other travel documents to one person for different names, a spokesman for the Home Office reported. We usually do not discuss the affairs of private people, said the Home Office, but as far as Boris Berezovsky is concerned, we can say that he got an asylum in our country. When a person receives refugee status in this country but has not become a citizen yet, he has the right to

go abroad, but is not given a British passport or travel documents in accordance with the 1951 Convention. (RIA-Novosti)

EXPLOSION ROCKS GEORGIAN TV CENTER

4 December

An explosion rocked the state television centre in Georgian capital Tbilisi on Wednesday, in what the new government said was an attempt to disrupt elections scheduled to replace the overthrown president. "There are some forces in Georgia which are interested in bringing panic to this society, but I want to tell our society that we new leaders won't allow it," Georgia's interim president, Nino Burdzhanadze, told state television. "We will be able to hold normal presidential elections in January." The state security ministry said the explosion had been powerful but that there were no casualties. State television, which was interviewing the Russian ambassador at the time, continued with its broadcasts and no evacuation of the building was ordered. "The Television and Radio Corporation was damaged, especially the radio wing. But fortunately, there were no people there," a spokesman said. Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze quit last month after opposition supporters massed in Tbilisi saying his allies had won parliamentary elections fraudulently. Georgia is holding new presidential elections on January 4. The reason for the blast was not immediately clear. "It could not have been a gas cylinder, because at the television station we do not use gas. As for other versions, it is hard for me to say, since there were no calls or threats," said Ednar Giorgobiani, the deputy head of state television. Russia encouraged Shevardnadze, a former Soviet foreign minister instrumental in ending the Cold War, to step down peacefully but has since been accused by the new leaders of interfering in Georgia's domestic affairs. The Russian Ambassador Vladimir Chkhikvishvili said the blast offered further proof that former Soviet Georgia, which is plagued by unemployment, corruption and poverty, had not settled down after the "velvet revolution". "What has just happened is evidence of the unstable situation that there is in Georgia," he said. A prominent pro-Shevardnadze politician had her apartment fired upon on Tuesday, but there has been no general breakdown of order in the volatile country, which suffered civil war following the collapse of the Soviet Union. (Reuters)

ARMENIA RAISES MINIMUM WAGE

4 December

Parliament voted on 3 December to increase the minimum monthly legal wage from 5,000 drams (\$9) to 13,000 drams beginning in January 2004, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Social Security Minister Aghvan Vartanian said the

increase will in the first instance benefit some 35,000 public-sector workers who are currently paid 7,000-8,000 drams per month. The average salary in the public sector, which employs some 260,000 people, is 22,000 drams per month. (RFE/RL)

UZBEK LAWYERS ON STRIKE OVER OFFICIAL INTERFERENCE, LOW PAY

4 December

More than 400 lawyers in Tashkent have declared a strike from 3 to 13 December to protest the interference of government agencies – the Interior Ministry, National Security Service, prosecutors, and judges -- in their work. The Initiative Group of the Independent Human Rights Activists of Uzbekistan reported that the striking lawyers were also protesting their low pay-- the average monthly wage of a lawyer as set by the government is 8,000 soms (about \$8). The strikers said they were also angered by the constant flouting of the Criminal Procedural Code by prosecutors who question accused persons in the absence of their lawyers, by the falsification of investigation and court records, and by unjust sentences handed down in the courts. (Prime News)

BOMB ABOARD COMMUTER TRAIN KILLS MORE THAN 30

5 December

At least 38 people were killed and more than 150 injured on 5 December by an explosion on a commuter train near the Stavropol Krai town of Yessentuki. Local police said that the explosion was caused by a bomb placed in a car on the crowded commuter train, while some reports indicated that a female suicide bomber might have been involved. Police immediately announced that they suspect Chechen militants carried out the attack. On 3 September, a similar incident aboard a commuter train in Kislovodsk killed seven and injured more than 90. (RFE/RL)

U.S. SAYS SEES REAL INSTABILITY THREAT IN GEORGIA

5 December

The United States said on Friday that Georgia's three restive regions and Russian intimidation in the ex-Soviet Caucasus meant Georgia faced a real threat of instability after last month's bloodless revolution. U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was meeting Georgia's new leaders, including Acting President Nino Burdzhadze, in Tbilisi to stress Washington's commitment to stability in the state, a U.S. official said. But the armed kidnapping on Friday of a co-founder of Georgia's main commercial bank underlined the problems that emerged when President Eduard Shevardnadze was forced to step down by protests over a disputed November 2 parliamentary poll. Burdzhadze called on Georgians to remain calm after the capital was rattled by a series of violent incidents, including an explosion in front of state television headquarters and shots fired at the flat of a leading pro-Shevardnadze politician. Georgian

developments are under close scrutiny by the West, keen to see completion of a \$2.5 billion pipeline due to take Caspian oil to the Mediterranean as an alternative to the Gulf. "The potential for instability is there and real," the U.S. official said, naming three Georgian regions as "a very destabilising piece" of the equation. He also said there was American concern over "Russian intimidation" of countries in the region, citing Moscow's failure to pull its troops out of Georgia as an example. As well as meeting Burdzhadze, Rumsfeld was due to see Mikhail Saakashvili – the leader of the opposition protests that brought down Shevardnadze – State Minister Zurab Zhvania and Foreign Minister Tedo Japaridze. Earlier this week, Washington issued a thinly veiled warning to Russia not to back breakaway Georgian regions. Tbilisi also accused Moscow of meddling when Russian officials met leaders of three Georgian regions – Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Adzhara. (Reuters)

TWO GEORGIAN BORDER GUARD OFFICIALS FIRED OVER BEREZOVSKY VISIT

7 December

The head of the analysis department of Georgia's border protection agency, Irakly Papava, and the head of the Tbilisi airport checkpoint, Khvicha Dvalishvili, were dismissed in the wake of Boris Berezovsky's visit to Tbilisi on December 3, a Border Department source has reported. The Prosecutor General's Office has opened an investigation against Papava and Dvalishvili. Border Department Chairman Valery Chkheidze submitted his resignation to acting president Nino Burjanadze on Friday, but it was not accepted. The Russian Prosecutor General's Office had announced that a search is underway to find Berezovsky. Although pertinent documents were sent to Georgia, the Berezovsky's name was not included in their computer network. Moreover, Chkheidze was not informed in a timely fashion about Berezovsky's arrival in Tbilisi. The Georgian Prosecutor General's Office has started a criminal case in the wake of the visit. Prosecutor General Nugzar Gabrichidze said the case involves abuse of office for personal gain. Punishment for such offenses can range from a fine to three years in prison. Berezovsky visited Tbilisi at the invitation of his business partner Badri Patarkatsishvili by using a passport in the name of Platon Elenin. He arrived and departed without any interference and investigators will try to determine if the visit had been arranged beforehand. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION LEADER CALLS FOR END TO PROTEST HUNGER STRIKE

8 December

Isa Qambar, Musavat party chairman and defeated presidential challenger, appealed on 8 December to participants to end the hunger strike they began on 1 December. The hunger strikers are demanding the release of some 100 opposition activists detained following clashes between police and opposition supporters in the wake of the disputed 15 October presidential ballot. Democratic Party of Azerbaijan Secretary-General Serdar Djalaloglu, who was

arrested on 18 October for his imputed role in the unrest, ended his hunger strike on 8 December. Djalaloglu issued a statement that day urging the Azerbaijani people to campaign more actively for "democratic values," and for the invalidation of the official results of the 15 October presidential ballot, and the holding of a new presidential election. (Turan)

TAJIK ROAD BUILDERS COMPLETE ALTERNATE NORTH-SOUTH ROUTE

8 December

The Tajik Transport Ministry has completed a route that permits communication by road between southern and northern Tajikistan in winter when the usual route over the Anzob Pass is closed by snow. Instead of using roads in Uzbekistan as was previously necessary, the new route crosses part of Kyrgyzstan's Osh Oblast. The new route will allow Tajik truckers and passenger-bus firms to avoid the type of problems with Uzbek border guards and customs officials that were recently reported by trucking firms in the west Tajik town of Pendzhikent. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

UNIFIED RUSSIA WINS BIG

8 December

Central Election Commission (TsIK) Aleksandr Veshnyakov announced that as of 10 a.m., Moscow time, that day and with 90.58 percent of the vote counted, the results of the 7 December State Duma election according to party lists were as follows: Unified Russia -- 36.84 percent; the Communist Party of Russia -- 12.74 percent; the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) -- 11.8 percent; the Motherland-Patriotic Union bloc -- 9.02 percent; Yabloko -- 4.3 percent; the Union of Rightist Forces (SPS) -- 3.9 percent; and the Agrarian Party -- 3.8 percent. Veshnyakov said that SPS and Yabloko have almost no chance of winning the 5 percent necessary to gain party-list seats in the new Duma. Turnout, he said, exceeded 55 percent. (Interfax)

TYCOON THREATENS TO SUE MOSCOW

8 December

In an interview published in Britain's "Financial Times" on 5 December, Berezovskii said that he intends to file a \$1 billion claim against the Russian government in the British courts and the European Court of Human Rights in connection with Moscow's alleged seizure of his media, mining, and oil-sector assets. Berezovskii said that after he began criticizing President Putin, he was forced to sell his stake in major Russian companies, including ORT, TV-6, and Sibneft. Former oligarch Vladimir Gusinskii has filed a similar suit against the Kremlin with the European Court of Human Rights, and Moscow should expect a similar complaint from former Yukos head Khodorkovskii, the newspaper wrote. (RFE/RL)

EXPLOSION KILLS SIX IN CENTRAL MOSCOW

9 December

An explosion outside the National Hotel in downtown Moscow on 9 December killed six people and injured at least 13 others. Police did not confirm initial reports that the explosion was caused by one or two female suicide bombers, although Sergei Tsoi, a spokesman for Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, was quoted as saying, "We can say with certainty that this was a terrorist act." Police used a robot to neutralize a second explosive found in a suitcase at the scene. The agency further reported that the bomb had been packed with nails and metal fragments to increase its devastation. Interfax cited an unidentified Federal Security Service (FSB) source as saying that a "suspicious woman" entered the hotel shortly before the blast and asked how to find the State Duma building. "This terrorist act was linked to the [7 December] elections to the State Duma," Tsoi said, without elaborating. (ITAR-TASS)

OSCE, COUNCIL OF EUROPE CRITICIZE DUMA POLL

9 December

The OSCE and the Council of Europe said on 8 December that the results of the State Duma election were "fundamentally distorted," "The Moscow Times" reported on 9 December. The two groups, which had about 500 observers monitoring the 7 December elections, cited abuses of administrative resources during the campaign, including preferential coverage by the state media and the fact that about one-third of the country's governors were on Unified Russia's party list. While the international observers praised the TsIK for conducting the election "highly professionally," they called the process as a whole "fundamentally unfair." The president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Bruce George, said the contest "failed in meeting many OSCE and international standards" and was a "regression in the democratization process in Russia." In Washington, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said the Bush administration shares the OSCE's concerns about the fairness of the election. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA'S ARMENIAN COMMUNITY PROPOSES TALKS ON STATUS

9 December

David Rstakian, head of the unregistered political party Virk that represents the interests of the predominantly Armenian population of Georgia's southern region of Djavakheti, wants talks with the new Georgian leadership on granting the region formal status, whether autonomy or as part of a federation or confederation. Rstakian said that while autonomy "is the way to preserve everything that helps us feel Armenian: our language, culture, and traditions," autonomy "may not be enough" to satisfy the local Armenian population. Rstakian also said the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki, the swift closure of which the new Georgian leadership is demanding, serves "as the guarantor of the physical security" of

Djavakheti's Armenian population. The base also employs some 2,000 local Armenians. (Caucasus Press)

IMPRISONED UZBEK JOURNALIST RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISM AWARD

9 December

Imprisoned Uzbek journalist Ruslan Sharipov has received the 2004 Golden Pen of Freedom award from the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers (WAN) for his promotion of press freedom in the face of physical attacks, torture, and constant harassment. The award is to be presented at the World Newspaper Congress in Istanbul in May 2004. In its citation, WAN's board said that Sharipov has faced unspeakable hardships because he refused to stop criticizing the Uzbek government in his writings or end his human rights work. Sharipov was sentenced to five years in prison in August on charges of homosexuality and corruption of minors. The latter charge was later dropped and his sentence was reduced to four years; human rights activists inside Uzbekistan and in the international human rights community are demanding Sharipov's release, saying that the real reason for his arrest was his critical journalism. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA IN MIXED FEELINGS OVER RUSSIA'S VISA MOVE

10 December

Georgia welcomes the simplified visa system between Russia and Adjara (Georgian autonomy bordering on Turkey) introduced on December 9th but as well expresses its dissatisfaction that this step was not coordinated with Georgian authorities. This was disclosed by Georgian Ambassador to Russia Zurab Abashidze. "We understand Russia's intention to simplify entrance and exit for citizens living in Adjara," the Ambassador said. The visa system between Russia and Georgia was introduced not upon the Georgian initiative, he recalled. "Georgia always speaks for the gradual simplification of the visa regime, which creates numerous obstacles for citizens of the both countries," Abashidze stressed. "However, changing the visa regime with one of the Georgian regions without having coordinated this issue with the Georgian authorities is a gross violation of the international regulations and non-observance of the elemental ethics of international relations," the Ambassador said. (Reuters)

Pro-Moscow official kidnapped in Chechnya

11 December

50-year-old Nurdi Elmurzayev, administration head of the city of Alkhan-Kaly in Chechnya, was kidnapped by unknown people, The republic's Interior Ministry reported on Wednesday. "The kidnapping took place on Tuesday at the Grozny-Alkhan-Kaly highway when Elmurzayev was driving his car without bodyguards, the Interior Ministry said. According to preliminary data, the administration head was abducted by armed people dressed in camouflage and masks. Murzayev's car, a VAZ-2105 was found on the roadside later. Investigation is underway. (RIA-Novosti)

UZBEK AUTHORITIES APOLOGIZE FOR INCURSION INTO KYRGYZSTAN

11 December

Uzbek law enforcement authorities from Namangan Oblast apologized to their Kyrgyz colleagues in neighboring Djalal-Abad Oblast, thereby defusing a potentially unpleasant border incident that began when five Uzbek police officers and a prosecutor illegally crossed the Kyrgyz border to arrest a Kyrgyz citizen on 10 December. The Uzbek officers forced the Kyrgyz into their car, but were chased to the border by the detainee's fellow villagers, who freed him and handed the Uzbeks over to the Kyrgyz police. Kyrgyz law enforcement officials said the man who had been seized by the Uzbeks was not involved in any criminal activity. The Djalal-Abad Oblast administration reported that the Uzbek side apologized for the incident and took the six captured officers away. (akipress.org)

PUTIN ADVISER SAYS MERGER OF CHECHNYA, INGUSHETIA 'EXPEDIENT'

12 December

Speaking in Rostov-na-Donu on 9 December, Aslanbek Aslakhonov, who is President Putin's adviser on Chechen affairs, said he considers "possible and expedient" the creation of a single federation subject by combining Chechnya and Ingushetia, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" reported on 11 December. Pro-Moscow Chechen leader Akhmad-hadji Kadyrov first advocated such a merger shortly after his election in October. At that time, Aslakhonov expressed doubts whether Ingushetia would agree to such a merger, and Ingush President Murat Zyazikov said that a merger is unnecessary and not economically viable. Zyazikov's predecessor, Ruslan Aushev, said in October he believes the idea originated in the Kremlin. "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 11 December quoted Aushev as saying the population of the two republics would reject a merger, and it would only exacerbate tensions in the North Caucasus. A Russian political scientist told the same paper that the Kremlin might push for such a merger if and when it decides to withdraw support for Kadyrov, who is lobbying for the right to retain all taxes raised in Chechnya together with profits from the republic's oil sector. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN, AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENTS MEET

12 December

Robert Kocharian and Ilham Aliyev met for 90 minutes in Geneva on 11 December on the sidelines of the World Information Summit to discuss the Karabakh conflict, Western media reported. The two presidents subsequently told journalists that their talks amounted to a frank exchange of views. Armenian Public Television quoted Kocharian as saying that he and Aliyev "analyzed the new situation," but did not discuss specific peace proposals. Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliev told journalists that the purpose of the meeting was to enable the two leaders "to get to know each other." Guliev said that earlier talks between Kocharian

and Aliyev's father and predecessor as president, Heidar Aliyev, had yielded some progress toward resolving the conflict, but that no written agreements were ever concluded between the two, and that "we do not exclude starting from scratch." Guliev's Armenian counterpart Vartan Oskanian said in an interview published on 11 December in the Yerevan daily "Haykakan zhamanak" that "we expect...positive signals from Azerbaijan's president to continue negotiations on the existing basis," which would make it possible to reach a solution to the conflict next year. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI COURT SENTENCES VOLUNTEERS FOR CHECHEN CAUSE

12 December

After a two-month trial, Azerbaijan's Court for Serious War Crimes passed sentence on four young men, including one citizen of Algeria and one of Mauritania, who under the guise of engaging in humanitarian activity recruited volunteers to fight with the Chechen resistance. The two Arabs were sentenced on 11 December to nine years' imprisonment, while two Azerbaijanis found guilty of undergoing military training at a camp in neighboring Georgia were each jailed for three years. (Turan)

UZBEK LEADER DEMOTES PM AFTER POOR COTTON HARVEST

12 December

Uzbek President Islam Karimov said on Thursday he had appointed a new prime minister who would pay closer attention to agriculture following the country's lowest ever cotton harvest, its main export. Karimov told parliament in the Central Asian state that he had appointed Shavkat Mirziyavev, 46, prime minister to replace Uktir Sultanov, who would be demoted to deputy prime minister in charge of industry after eight years in the job. "We must recognise that (Sultanov's) style of leadership shows a tendency towards industry," Karimov told parliament. "Maybe in order to foresee and resolve problems in agriculture Sultanov did not have enough experience." Uzbekistan, the world's second largest cotton exporter, saw its cotton harvest fall 11 percent to 2.86 million tonnes this year – far below the four million tonnes it regularly produced for the Soviet Union between 1960 and independence in 1991. The country has barely reformed its economy since the collapse of the Soviet Union and Karimov has become one of the most autocratic rulers in the region. (KPЖ)

MOURNERS HONOUR DEAD AZERI PRESIDENT IN BAKU

15 December

Thousands of Azeris thronged the streets of Baku on Sunday to honour former President Haydar Aliyev, whose body was flown home to lie in state before a funeral to be attended by heads of most neighbouring states. Aliyev dominated Azerbaijan for three decades but became increasingly ill in the

last year and died in a U.S. clinic where he had been undergoing heart treatment since August. He will be buried on Baku's "Alley of Honour" next to his wife Zarifa on Monday. Aliyev, dubbed "Baba" (Grandfather) by Azeris, was the second veteran politician to leave the political stage in the volatile Caucasus region within a month. Georgia's Eduard Shevardnadze, who worked with Aliyev in the Soviet government, resigned as president after mass protests last month but was expected to attend his friend's funeral. Georgia's new acting president and the presidents of Iran, Turkey, Russia and Ukraine were also expected to attend. "At this tragic time I send the deepest condolences to the fraternal Azeri people and to the nearest and dearest of Haydar Aliyev," said Russian President Vladimir Putin. (Reuters)

TAJIK GROUP GOES TO RUSSIA TO BRING HOME LABOR MIGRANTS

15 December

A commission of Tajik railway officials, law enforcement officers, and journalists has gone to Astrakhan to help Tajik labor migrants stranded in the southern Russian city to return home. The stranded migrants appealed for help in a message that was published in the Dushanbe newspaper "Charkh-i Gardun" on 28 November. That message said that state air and rail booking offices were refusing to sell tickets to the migrants, and commercial sources were charging more than they could afford. Earlier, a Tajik team was sent to Moscow to investigate fraud allegations made by migrants against the Tajik national transportation office in the Russian capital. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

TWO KYRGYZ PARTIES TO NOMINATE IMPRISONED LEADER FOR PRESIDENT

15 December

Two Kyrgyz opposition parties -- Ar-Namys and Ata-Meken -- have decided jointly to nominate imprisoned Ar-Namys leader and former Vice President Feliks Kulov for the 2005 presidential election, said parliamentarian and Ata-Meken leader Omurbek Tekebaev. Tekebaev described Kulov as the most important opposition candidate. Kulov is currently serving a 10-year sentence for alleged abuse of office during his government service as head of the National Security Service, vice president, and mayor of Bishkek. Akaev has said repeatedly that he will not run again. Although Kyrgyz law bars convicts from taking part in elections, the constitution contains no such restriction, Tekebaev noted. (RFE/RL)

TROOPS, HOSTAGE TAKERS CLASH IN DAGHESTAN

16 December

Additional police detachments were sent on 15 December to Daghestan's Tsunta Raion to try to apprehend a group of some 25-30 militants, said by Russian officials to be Chechens, who seized four hostages, including a doctor, in the predominantly Avar-populated village of Shauri earlier that day. Daghestan's Interior Minister Adilgirei

Magomedtagirov also headed for the site of the abductions. The militants then split into several groups and retreated westward toward the internal border between Daghestan and Chechnya. The hunt for them was complicated by adverse weather. Turan reported that the raiders reappeared during the morning of 16 December in the village of Galatali, where they seized further hostages and then retreated into the mountains after an exchange of fire with Russian troops in which seven of the militants were killed. Daghestan parliament Chairman Mukhu Aliyev said on 16 December that the gunmen are definitely Chechens and that they entered Daghestan from Chechnya. (RFE/RL)

7 Chechen fighters killed in Dagestan – FSB

16 December

Seven militants were killed in the Tsuntinsky district of Dagestan on Tuesday morning, chief of the North-Caucasian regional border guard administration of the Federal Security Service, Lieutenant-General Nikolai Lesinsky, reported. The General did not disclose any details of the operation. On Monday morning the border guards discovered a bandit group in the Tsuntinsky district of Dagestan. Ten border guards were killed in the shootout. The rebel group had up to 40 combatants, according to different data. After the shootout with the border guards the bandits took four residents of the Shauri village hostage and headed for the administrative border between Chechnya and Dagestan. The operation to catch the bandits was immediately put into effect. On Tuesday a group of militants was discovered and blocked in the Galatli village of the Tsuntinsky district of Dagestan. (RIA-Novosti)

PUTIN EXPRESSES CONDOLENCES TO AZERI LEADER

16 December

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Baku on Monday morning to attend the funeral of ex-president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev. The Russian leader headed directly from the airport to the Respublika palace, where the coffin has been placed. The Russian president laid a wreath at the coffin. One of the ribbons on the wreath bore the inscription: "From the Russian Federation." After a minute of silence in Aliyev's memory, Putin approached his relatives and then sat down next to Ilkham Aliyev. President Vladimir Putin has described Geidar Aliyev as a person who could foresee long-term prospects. (RIA-Novosti)

PIPELINE CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN GEORGIA STRIKE FOR PAY INCREASE

16 December

Local workers engaged in the construction of the Georgian section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan export pipeline for Caspian oil have staged protest strikes at several locations over the past week to demand a pay increase and that their wages be paid on time, Georgian media reported. They are complaining that they are paid only 1 lari (\$0.46) per day, whereas their counterparts in Azerbaijan and Turkey receive \$2 per hour. Builders in Tetri Tsqaro put down their tools on 11 December, while some 100 of their colleagues went on strike in Rustavi on 14 December. Similar incidents were reported in Marneuli, Tsalka, and Gardabani. (Caucasus Press)

