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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: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

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

BACKGROUND: 300-400 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-400 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

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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. 700-800 words.

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

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NEW TURNS IN CHINESE POLICY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA

Stephen Blank

Although observers of Central Asian affairs have recently focused on the debacle in Andijon and before that on Kyrgyzstan's revolution, profound geostrategic changes, partly influenced by these events, are also occurring, but with much less fanfare or analysis. For example, China's newest moves in Central Asia reflect not just its rising capability, long-standing desire to suppress any possible external support for insurgents in Xinjiang, long-held great power ambitions, or rising hunger for energy, but also the impact of those events. The intersection of these events upon China's recent policy initiatives reveal several new departures in Beijing's foreign policies toward Central Asia. Taken together, these initiatives suggest interesting possibilities and the steadily growing importance of this area for Beijing and for its interlocutors.

BACKGROUND: In the wake of the Andijon massacre and Kyrgyz revolution, we may discern the following new and significant trends in Chinese policy, possibly due to these events. China has abandoned its earlier reticence about former Russian Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov's strategic triangle with Russia and India and agreed to a meeting of Foreign Ministers of the three states in Vladivostok on June 2. At this meeting the war on terror, access to Central Asian energy (including Iran), and the issue of uprisings in Central Asia were discussed among the participants although we do not know what practical conclusions, if any, they reached. Second, China has pushed to invigorate the Shanghai Cooperative Organization to use it as an agency for both bilateral and multilateral action to suppress popular unrest in Central Asia and to strengthen it as a bulwark against Western (especially American) ideas and policies about democratization. Thus it is becoming the equivalent of the 19th century holy alliance against revolution. As part of this program China has supported the SCO decision, and may well have instigated it, to make India, Pakistan, and Iran observers of the SCO.

Both these decisions: support for the strategic triangle and for enlarging the scope and membership of the SCO reveal Beijing's efforts to ward off possible rivalry with India in Central Asia and to tamp down both its earlier tensions with India there and in South Asia. It is also very possible that a series of

understandings with India about energy access from Central Asia, Russia, and Iran are in the offing so that any potential rivalry with India here that could spill over into Central Asia will also be averted. By effecting these understandings with New Delhi, China hopes to reduce the possibility that India might lean to the American agenda here and be a stalking horse for Washington or even an independent rival of China's in this increasingly sensitive, even vital sphere of its interests.

Third, China has continued to upgrade its military capability, particularly with regard to the dispatch of rapid reaction forces to the area. The widespread reports of Chinese interests in a base in Kyrgyzstan, though denied, may yet come to fruition, possibly as an SCO base rather than a purely Chinese one. But we should have no illusions that China is engaged in both a qualitative improvement of its regional and local military capabilities here and is readier than ever to put them at the service of its interests if necessary. Its calls for upgrading the capabilities of the SCO and its upcoming combined exercises with Russian forces, ostensibly in an anti-terrorist scenario, albeit one that looks suspiciously like an anti-Taiwanese, American, or even Korean landing operation, also suggest heightened concern about trends in Central Asia.

Fourth, China has substantially enhanced its ties to Iran. This policy aims at more than ensuring a reliable

supply of energy although that certainly is a major Chinese motive. After all, Iran and China signed a \$70 billion energy deal in October, 2004. But this policy not only strengthens Iran against Washington in the Gulf and regarding nuclear proliferation, it also cements a shared purpose in restricting its ability to play in Central Asia and thus threaten both those states. Iranian elites, including candidates for the presidency in its current election, certainly welcome the idea of a bloc with China, Russia, and India (again the triangle) against Washington and make no secret of his aspiration.

Finally, there will probably be intensified courtship of Moscow and vice versa, not just on the basis of the triangle or the SCO but in the bilateral Sino-Russian relationship and in bilateral military cooperation. There are those in Russia calling for this and the recent decision by the SCO to create its own team of supposedly impartial outside observers to monitor presidential and other elections in Central Asia provide a mechanism for expressing not just common strategic goals, but more importantly, shared ideological-political aspirations to freeze the status quo in Central Asia.

IMPLICATIONS: China's new policy initiatives represent significant new departures in its policies toward the area even though they clearly grow out of its preexisting policies toward Central Asia. They bespeak both the increased importance of this area to China in terms of energy and the impact developments in Central Asia could have upon Xinjiang and China's overall state structure. They also attest to the increasing and widening rivalry with the United States in Russia and China's effort to build counter-coalitions against what it perceives to be U.S. encirclement and potential threats on its doorstep. Third, these policies also highlight the tremendous and strategic importance of energy access to China; an issue that is critical for the long-term and which already is and will be a major driver of future policies. Fourth, they point to the increasing militarization and strategic polarization of the Central Asian and post-Soviet "space" as rival security blocs are beginning to take shape and more and more exclusively military interests are beginning to make their presence felt here. The SCO, China's first

formal show of willingness to project power beyond its borders, is but one manifestation of this trend as are its 2003-2005 exercises and growing military links among all of its members.

Finally, the strategic bipolarity between America on the one hand and Russia, China, and Iran on the other is now being reinforced by ideological-political cleavages over democratization and human rights in both Central Asia and states like China, Iran, and Russia. This ideological dimension can only reinforce and strengthen the tensions that already are present with regard to rival strategic ambitions in and for the Caucasus and Central Asia. Thus they will make great power cooperation much harder to achieve and will also probably strengthen internal and inter-state cleavages in Central Asia as domestic players will now have foreign patrons to whom they can go for support and aid, or to whom they can complain about domestic conditions.

CONCLUSIONS: Several Years ago Zbigniew Brzezinski called this area the Eurasian Balkans. While the comparison or analogy may be inexact, the possibility that domestic factions in each country will be able to appeal to and pressure foreign governments to come to their aid, or that governments will be able to exploit the emerging bipolarity or tripolarity in this area by playing one bloc off against another to secure tangible political, military, and economic benefits all resemble the international crises through Yugoslavia's wars of the 1990s. Domestic and regional, if not international, cleavages will duly reinforce and replicate each other, making it much harder to stabilize local conditions or avoid great power confrontation in or over Central Asia. That structural geostrategic rivalry should not be in the interests of the United States or in that interests of the peoples of Central Asia. But it is becoming a fact, and China's new initiatives demonstrate not only its understanding of that fact, but also Beijing's resolution to exploit it to its own advantage.

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IRAN LAUNCHES TWO CASPIAN INITIATIVES

Hooman Peimani

On June 8 Iran made two announcements of long-term economic and political significance for the Caspian region. Tehran proposed to delegate oil and gas exploration of its potential Caspian Sea reserves to Russian corporations, a deal capable of boasting those corporations' regional and international status. Secondly, Iran offered to conclude 25-year swap deals with Russian companies enabling them to export a large amount of Caspian oil from Iran's Persian Gulf ports without major investments. These projects will boost expanding Iranian-Russian relations, and the swap deal could help Iran and Russia to reduce the expanding American economic and political influence in the Caspian region by challenging the long-term viability of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC).

BACKGROUND: Iranian-Russian relations have been growing since 1987 when then the Soviet Union changed its policy of supporting Iraq in its war against Iran. By removing obstacles and creating common political and security grounds, certain factors, apart from economic incentives, have made Tehran and Moscow closer to each other since 1991, including the Soviet Union's fall, Washington's efforts to create a unipolar international system and the growing presence of the Western countries, particularly the United States, in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

However, their cooperation on energy-related issues has been limited. Major differences over the Caspian Sea's legal regime, in general, and Russia's bilateral agreements with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan to divide the latter's northern part, in particular, have limited such cooperation. Moreover, Russia's and Iran's individual efforts to establish themselves as a major, if not the major, transit route for the exports of Caspian oil and gas has practically put the two countries in a competing position. Nevertheless, the American government's efforts to create a third route for such export bypassing both Iran and Russia have created grounds for their cooperation.

Being a major challenge to both Iran and Russia, the May inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, a major means to secure the American objective of exclude Iranian and diminish Russian influence over oil exports from Central Asia and the Caucasus, brought about a new urge for Iranian-Russian extensive cooperation on energy issues. Against this background, the timing of Iran's two major oil announcements less than two weeks after the BTC inauguration is not surprising.

Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs Hadi Nejad-Hosseini stated on June 8 that in his visit to Moscow, he had proposed to unspecified Russian energy corporations to delegate oil and gas exploration and development operations of Iran's Caspian Sea reserves yet to be discovered. Accordingly, upon reaching agreements with its Caspian neighbours, Iran would commission through buy-back agreements the exploration and development projects of such reserves to Russian companies as well as to non-Russian ones.

According to Nejad-Hosseini, in case of future discovery of economically viable oil and gas fields in Iran's sector of the Caspian Sea, the Russian companies would be authorized to recuperate their invested capital in such project along with a mutually agreed interest by selling the reserves'

production. Unspecified Russian companies to which the proposal was made will reportedly reply to the proposal within a month.

IMPLICATIONS: Given Iran's opposition to bilateral agreements to divide the Caspian Sea among its littoral states resulting in its refusal to make any such agreement with other littoral states, it is unclear, which part of the Caspian Sea will be offered for exploration to a successful Russian bidder. Moreover, even Nejad-Hosseinian acknowledged disputes between Iran and other littoral states, presumably Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, over the ownership of certain offshore oil and gas reserves. Keeping these obstacles in mind and in the absence of a binding legal regime, he mentioned Iran's plan to find a mechanism so that the Russian companies would be able to take part in its Caspian development projects. He added that certain oil and gas development projects, presumably in the undisputed Iranian Caspian waters, would be implemented regardless of the absence of such regime. As Iran will also invite other unspecified international oil companies to bid, Tehran will pursue such projects should the Russian companies decline to do so. However, the latter would have "a high chance" to win, Nejad-Hosseinian added.

In what appears to be a direct challenge to the US-backed BTC, Nejad-Hosseinian stated on June 8 that, during his Moscow visit, he also offered unidentified Russian oil companies 25-year swap deals for receiving as much as 300,000 barrels of Russian Caspian crude oil at Iran's Caspian Sea port of Neka and delivering to Russia's designated customers an equal volume of Iranian oil at the Iranian Persian Gulf oil terminals. If Iran succeeds in concluding such major swap deals, the large-scale,

in contrast to the current small-scale, swap of crude oil from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan via Iran will be a realistic option for both Iran and the two Caspian countries. Factors justifying such swap deals will include the much lower cost of exports through swap deals via Iran compared to the high exporting cost of oil from those countries through the BTC and Neka's potential capacity of handling up to 700,000 barrels of crude oil a day.

CONCLUSIONS: Thanks to stable and expanding Iranian-Russian relations, there is a solid political ground for concluding major oil and gas agreements between Iran and Russia, despite their disagreements over dividing the Caspian Sea. The two country's strong interests in extensive economic ties further encourage such agreements. In particular, the benefits of large and long-term swap deals between Iran and Russia should encourage both sides to conclude an agreement to that effect. Those deals will not only help Russia increase its exports and oil-generated revenue without heavy investments in its oil-export infrastructure, but will also guarantee a significant income in transit fee for Iran and feed most of its northern oil refineries now mainly fed from Iran's oil fields in the south. Moreover, such swap deals could turn Iran into an economically attractive route for exporting the portion of Turkmenistan's and Kazakhstan's oil not exported through Russia, a development with major political and economic implications for the Caspian region. However, all these are geared to the conclusion of an agreement in this regard and its implementation within the next few months.

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING WON'T GO AWAY IN GEORGIA

Tamar Mikadze

Human trafficking still remains a problem in Georgia, while the government's efforts to fight trafficking are scarce and ineffective. Two presidential decrees, the first issued by President Shevardnadze, the Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in 2003-2005, and the second one signed by President Saakashvili, the National Plan to Combat Trafficking for 2005-2006, were to date largely unproductive. The Georgian government has not been willing or able to redirect its attention from façade actions to designing and enacting effective policies to counter human trafficking. Though Georgia managed to escape its 2003 Teir-3 rating by the State Department, it is now back on the watch list, indicating serious steps need to be undertaken.

BACKGROUND: According to various estimates the scale of human trafficking in Georgia is on the rise, and the government's negligence to crack down on criminal networks puts more people at risk of being trafficked. Various sources indicate that hundreds of Georgians are trafficked annually to Turkey, Russia, France and Spain, Greece, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Germany, the Netherlands, with smaller numbers trafficked to Israel and Portugal, and even as far as Philippines. Because of the proximity of and cheaper travel Turkey seems a chief destination country. According to the interview conducted by the Organization for People's Harmonious Development with the border patrol and police, 800-1200 people cross into Turkey from Sarpi daily, with the peak during the summer months, while 600-800 Georgian citizens visit the border from Turkey monthly in order to renew their visas and go back. Majority of these are young females and almost 50% are assessed to be victims of trafficking.

To Western Europe, Georgians are supposedly trafficked via Russia and then Finland. *Helsingin Sanomat* reports that in 2002-2004 more than 1,500 Georgian citizens arriving by bus crossed into Finland. Up to 90% of the passengers were young

women. The Finnish Frontier Guard assumes that many of these women may have ended up in the illicit sex trade in Western Europe. Unfortunately, there is no cooperation between the Finnish and the Georgian authorities, which could prove effective in identifying criminal networks involved. Reports of similar nature can be found in country reports on Greece, Turkey, Philippines, etc.

According to International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports, approximately 500 women are trafficked annually from Georgia. Additionally, since Georgia is located along a transit route between the Middle East and Europe, approximately 500 Armenian and 500 Azeri trafficking victims pass through Georgia every year. Unfortunately, Georgian authorities or NGOs carry out almost no research in this direction. It is obviously not possible to make effective policies if the Georgian government relies on anecdotal evidence and few IOM reports. Additionally, the underground nature of the problem as well as the cultural tradition stigmatizing victims of trafficking makes it difficult to reveal them and estimate their true numbers. According to the survey conducted by "Women for Future", 67% of respondents considered it shameful for a woman to become a

victim of trafficking. Another challenge is general mistrust toward law enforcement in Georgia. According to the same study, only 6% of the respondents indicated that they would inform the police in case they learn that somebody is a trafficker, bringing as a reason rampant corruption in police and the fear of repercussions. During much of the 2004 reporting period, the Ministry of Interior's anti-trafficking unit focused mostly on illegal adoptions rather than trafficking. Otherwise, police was mainly active in revealing the victims of trafficking rather than the traffickers. In nearly all cases currently under investigation, police have learned about human trafficking after the victims had succeeded in fleeing the captors. Measures taken both by police and by the Georgian government were mainly reactive and ineffective. Fighting trafficking qualifies more as trying to avoid US sanctions rather than designing a practical, cohesive strategy grounded in thorough research and dedication to eradicate the problem.

IMPLICATIONS: The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 requires the Department of State (DOS) of the United States to submit to the US Congress each year a list of countries of origin, transit, or destination for victims of "severe forms of trafficking". The annual Trafficking in Victims Report (TIP) repeatedly placed Georgia in the list of Tier 2 countries in 2001, 2002, and 2003. This was a serious warning for Georgia, as beginning in FY 2004, countries listed by the DOS in the TIP as failing to make significant efforts to meet minimum standards to end severe forms of trafficking are subject to sanctions - cut off of non-trade, non-humanitarian aid. Tier 2 ranking means that Georgia does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. However, in June 2003 the DOS categorized Georgia as a "Tier 3" country. Making good use of the 90-day "grace period", the Georgian government hastily amended the Criminal Code adding in the new Articles - 144 and 172, criminalizing trafficking in persons - "Trade in humans or implementation of other illegal

transaction in relation to humans", and "Trade of underage children". Two cases were initiated under the amended Criminal Code, but they were not brought to trial by the year's end. Several other cases were initiated against some traffickers using fraud statutes. Finally, in January, the government's Action Plan for Combating the Trafficking of Persons was announced. In just three months, in September 2003, DOS quickly "upgraded" Georgia back to Tier 2. However, hasty reforms carried out by the Georgian government in order to avoid sanctions did not change the big picture.

During the 2004 reporting period a new government came into power in Georgia. President Saakashvili signed the National Plan to Combat Trafficking for 2005-2006. However, the situation did not actually improve. Because of the government's failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking in persons compared to the previous year, Georgia has been placed on special Tier 2 Watch List. This implies that the absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking in this country is very significant or is significantly increasing. It is worth noting that Ukraine and Moldova, countries that were in the previous years considered to be more affected by trafficking than any other former Soviet Union republic, are placed in Tier 2 in 2004 report as well.

CONCLUSIONS: The ramifications of the Georgian government's current negligent attitude and haphazard approach to combating trafficking are sad. Unless the Georgian government steps up anti-trafficking efforts, trafficking will undoubtedly soon reach even greater proportions. The Tier 2 Watch List ranking is alarming, but even more alarming is the problem itself, although even its exact scale is unknown. Evidently, anti-trafficking efforts should not be limited to updating laws and issuing decrees solely. The government needs to attack the problem on multiple fronts simultaneously, focusing on identifying and eradicating criminal networks and corrupt officials, on the one hand, and launching more effective educational programs on the other. It is common sense that preventive and proactive action is the

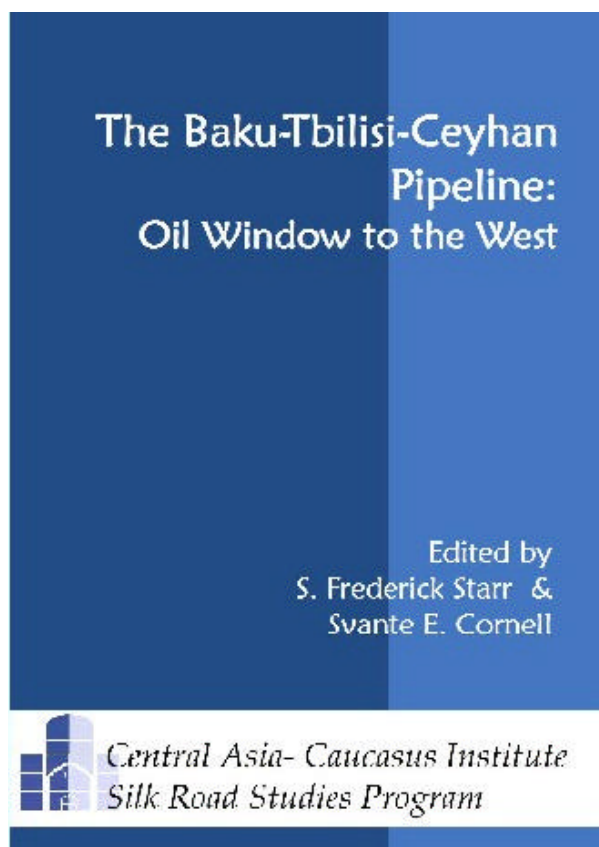
most cost-effective. Within the country, activities of labor and travel mediation agencies should be investigated and monitored. Statistical information should be gathered on the people that they had assisted in getting visas. Another most important area is effective rehabilitation of the victims, and when possible rescuing them from abuse and exploitation.

An important step would be to direct cooperative anti-trafficking efforts towards disrupting the trafficking routes to the destination countries, as well as collaborating with those countries, for which Georgia serves as a transit country, in the first place neighboring Armenia and Azerbaijan. Considerable experience could be gained by looking at how the

Baltic states work together and with the North European countries which are the primary destination countries for the Baltic republics.

Only by understanding the nature of the problem, through international cooperation, and by learning the lessons of other countries with successful track record will it be possible to make significant steps towards fighting the problem and decreasing the absolute numbers of the victims of trafficking in Georgia. But first, there is a need for strong commitment on the part of the Georgian government.

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AFTER THE BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN PIPELINE: LOOKING AHEAD

Svante E. Cornell and Mamuka Tsereteli

The building and inauguration of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline constitutes a strategic milestone in post-Soviet Eurasia, and is in this sense a reason to celebrate. The pipeline will have major implications for the South Caucasus, especially as regards its role in European and World Politics. But BTC's coming online is no reason for complacency. Quite to the contrary, it heralds a new stage in Caspian energy development. Specifically, it brings to the agenda the issue of disputed oil fields in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian, and even more importantly, the future export routes of Kazakhstan's giant Kashagan field.

BACKGROUND: The building of BTC reconfigures the mental map with which political observers and decision-makers in the Caucasus look at the world. BTC constitutes an umbilical cord that will tie Azerbaijan and Georgia in ever closer relation to Europe. For Turkey, with its significant trade relations to Russia including the Blue Stream gas pipeline, BTC is a cause to revisit its eastern vocation. For Russia, BTC provides a further testimony to the fact that the states of the South Caucasus are independent and sovereign actors, where Russia has a natural right to influence, but not to dictate policy. For the United States and Europe, BTC provides a much needed source of additional energy reserves as well as a further impetus for western involvement in the energy and security sectors of the wider Caspian basin.

Indeed, BTC proves that the lofty but near forgotten ambitions of building an east-west corridor linking Europe to Central Asia and beyond via the Caucasus are not only possible but are being realized. Already, BTC should be understood as part of, and driver of, the larger South Caucasus transport corridor. The BTC project in fact made it feasible to build the South Caucasus gas pipeline, which will carry natural gas from Azerbaijan's Shah-Deniz field to Turkish and in the future European markets. In addition, as BTC is being developed, the project of building the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Turkey Highway and the Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars Railroad are slowly materializing.

The BTC pipeline is a major step in anchoring Georgia and Azerbaijan to Europe. By itself, it strengthens their economic security; and moreover, it is a sine qua non for the implementation of the wider East-West transportation and communications corridor. As such, it is a crucial factor in building true sovereignty and independence for these states and enabling them to freely choose their foreign and security policy strategy and orientation. **IMPLICATIONS:** The completion of BTC will have implications that affect a larger area, most importantly Central Asia. The successful completion of BTC constitutes a first step toward providing the lands East of the Caspian Sea with a direct connection to Europe that does not depend on former colonial overlords. There is hence reason to eschew complacency and look ahead to the opportunities that the construction of BTC will generate.

The production from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli fields will peak relatively quickly, and barring new discoveries and increased potential in the fields, production will fall below the 1 million bpd capacity of the BTC pipeline early in the next decade. This clearly raises the issue of other potential oil resources to be fed into the pipeline. The most immediate concern will be whether other oil projects in Azerbaijan will be realized in quantities that will affect the BTC pipeline's operation. This question is crucial in terms of Azerbaijan's future as a significant oil producer. As such, the completion of BTC raises the delicate question of the disputed oil fields along the still

disputed Azerbaijani-Iranian and Azerbaijani-Turkmen maritime borders. With every passing year, the issue of delimiting this border will be more pressing. The same is true as concerns the status of the Kyapaz/Sardar field, claimed by both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.

In the longer run, a major question is whether BTC and SCP will lead to the extension of the East-West energy corridor across the Caspian to Central Asia – in essence, whether Kazakhstani oil will feed into BTC, and whether Turkmenistani gas will complement the SCP. BTC may stimulate another big oil project to ship oil through the South Caucasus corridor: the elephantine Kazakh field of Kashagan, the largest single oil find in the past two decades, whose transportation to markets has not yet been determined. Two or three options can be considered for Kashagan's oil. One is to export it through an expanded or parallel CPC pipeline to Novorossiysk. Two further options require oil to be brought across the Caspian by tanker or pipeline from Aktau to Baku. One is enlarging the capacity of BTC or build a parallel line to Ceyhan; another is to greatly expand the pipeline from Baku to Supsa, Georgia. Routing this oil westwards would increase Kazakhstan's security as an oil producer, strengthen the independence and statehood of Kazakhstan, and cement the expansion of the East-West corridor into Central Asia. This would further increase the geostrategic importance of the South Caucasus as a strategic link between Europe and Central Asia in energy and security terms.

In practice, Kazakhstani and Azerbaijani officials confirm discussing a plan that would entail a large volume of Kazakh oil, primarily from Kashagan, to flow to western markets via BTC through a 700-km pipeline laid across the Caspian and an expansion of the BTC to handle 1.7 million b/d. Eventually, as with BTC, the eventual transportation of Kashagan oil will be decided by a mixture of economic and political concerns.

Disagreements between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan killed the Transcaspian gas pipeline project (TCP) in the late 1990s. In the longer term, reviving the TCP is clearly a possibility, though political developments in Turkmenistan hold key to its future prospects. Presently, Turkmenistan is forced to export gas through Russian pipeline systems at a price far below

world market levels. There are nevertheless indications that the Turkmen leadership is becoming increasingly frustrated with this situation. As a result, Ashgabat has begun to look around for other options, primarily the possibility of resurrecting the equally stranded Trans-Afghan Pipeline (TAP), which would bring Turkmen gas to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan. Yet TAP suffers from many problems, most importantly the fact that the Indian market is commercially key for the project. As long as India is reluctant to rely on Pakistan for its energy security, the prospects of building TAP are remote. In addition, technical problems such as the absence of roads to bring equipment to site in Afghanistan are significant. TCP, in this light, seems an easier option given the existence of the SCP and its impending connection to European gas markets. In this light, TCP seems in the longer run the only possible answer to current European over-dependency on Russian gas.

CONCLUSIONS: Though many objective reasons exist why Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas should be exported westwards, it would be unwise for Turkish, European, or regional leaders to assume that America will once again intervene to ensure that projects to their benefit will be realized, as was the case with BTC. In particular, Europe is the player that stands to gain most from the building of an energy bridge to Central Asia, to such an extent that this may be termed crucial for Europe's long-term energy security. European involvement will therefore be required for the realization of the ambitious vision of an energy corridor extending from Europe across the Caucasus to Central Asia, supplemented by a wider transportation and communications superhighway. If this is indeed accomplished, BTC will with hindsight be recalled as the historic, first major step in this direction.

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FIELD REPORTS

PRO-PRESIDENTIAL FORCES IN KAZAKHSTAN UNLEASH COVERED WAR ON “COLORED REVOLUTION”

Marat Yermukanov

In their numerous public appearances and during trips abroad, state officials of Kazakhstan emphatically excluded the possibility of repetition of Georgian or Kyrgyz-style regime change in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, the intensifying onslaught on independent media, opposition parties, and restriction of civic rights with the approach of 2006 presidential elections betray what lies behind the democratic rhetoric.

In an interview to the Russian newspaper *Tribuna* a month ago, Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev assured that the popular uprisings that shook Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan were inconceivable in economically and politically stable Kazakhstan. But his daughter, the leader of the Asar party and member of parliament Dariga Nazarbayeva sounded conspicuously less optimistic when, speaking at the party Congress of Asar, said the repetition of “colored revolution” scenario was possible in Kazakhstan. But, in her words, popular unrest in Kazakhstan may be triggered off not by the poverty of population or by some other economic reasons, but by the passivity of pro-presidential parties in the face of the danger of “export of democracy” to Kazakhstan by outside forces, assisted by “inner destructive forces”. Dariga Nazarbayeva also announced that the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan and the Asar party created a new political bloc and a coalition, “The union of Kazakhstan's people for democracy”.

It is evident to the naked eye that the call for consolidation of “democratic” forces is motivated by concerns of mobilizing pro-presidential parties against the opposition ahead of presidential

elections. The right moment is chosen to achieve this purpose. Following the split within the Communist party and the banning of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, the main remaining opposition party Ak Zhol split into two rivaling factions. However, the most influential opposition blocs united under the wing of For Fair Kazakhstan movement has great potential for winning a large electorate and receiving public support in the run-up to the presidential elections. On May 22, leaders of democratic movement, independent journalists and civic rights activists staged a meeting in Almaty in protest of the forced closure of the *Respublika* newspaper, an unsubstantiated 5 million tenge (\$37,600) fine imposed on the independent *Soz* paper, and the legal persecution of the *Zhuma-Taims* weekly.

A few days after that meeting, on June 2, Batyrkhan Darimbet, one of the active participants, founder of the *Azat* newspaper and a former journalist with the Kazakh service of Radio Liberty became the victim of a car accident near Taraz (South Kazakhstan). He died in hospital on June 7 after he was operated for a back injury. As in many other previous mysterious road accidents involving opposition journalists, the circumstances of the incident still remain unclear. Reportedly, Darimbet had to travel to Taraz to set up local branches of the *Alga, DVK!* (Forward, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan!) opposition movement. In November 2002, the prominent journalist Nuri Muftakh, who worked with Batyrkhan Darimbet for the *Azat* paper and a number of other opposition media outlets, was

killed by a bus in Shymkent. Since that time, three journalists have been killed in road accidents.

Beatings and intimidation of journalists by the police and persecutions have become commonplace to the extent that recently journalists from Pavlodar (North Kazakhstan) appealed to the regional chief of police Murat Tumarbekov demanding legal protection from police harassment. They complained that over the past few months, 10 journalists were unlawfully detained, subjected to humiliation and beaten by the police, obviously for running articles critical of local authorities.

This tactic of intimidation is likely to be used extensively in coming months as political developments in the country enter the pre-election phase. The tough attitude to press freedom and civic rights and the fear of losing the reigns of politics is what really unites the communist-era leaders of Central Asian states. Nursultan Nazarbayev, amid the public protests over the events in Andijan, stopped short of condemning the brutalities in the Uzbek town. The foreign minister of Tajikistan,

Talbak Nazarov, who came to Astana to attend the meeting of foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, actually echoed Nazarbayev's ostentatious optimism, saying that a colored revolution in Tajikistan is unimaginable. Ironically, his words were uttered at the moment when international human rights organizations were clamoring for the release of the jailed independent journalist Jumobay Tolibov.

The grim prospect of the spread of public uprisings in Central Asia compels authoritarian leaders to verbal solidarity. But unity is something badly needed to consolidate the opposition movement in Kazakhstan. The opposition is weakened not only by factional strife within political factions, but also, most ominously, along Russian-Kazakh ethnic lines. The regime tries to use this situation to its own ends playing off the growing sentiment of national-patriotism among Kazakh opposition against the Slavic "cosmopolitanism". So far, the tactic of sowing dissent in the ranks of the opposition seems to work.

ARMENIA EVALUATES THE PROS AND CONS OF THE BTC PIPELINE

Grigor Hakobyan

The opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline in Baku on May 25 has provoked various discussions, criticism and analysis in Armenia from different levels of society. Different media outlets, government officials and political analysts offered their assessments of the impact that the BTC opening is going to have on Armenia and the extent that it may influence the position of Armenia, Azerbaijan and the OSCE co-chairs in the ongoing negotiation process over the unresolved Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict regarding Mountainous Karabakh. Specifically, the Armenian Center for National and International Studies convened a roundtable discussion entitled "Baku-Tbilisi-

Ceyhan (BTC): A New Pulse in the Region," where participants attempted to shed light on Armenia's place and role this time in the context of regional economic developments. Well known policy analysts, public figures, academics and representatives of various media outlets and NGOs attended the conference.

During the conference, a representative of the Democracy and Civil Society Development Center 'Armat', Mr. Edward Aghajanov, an economist by training, gave a presentation on "The Economic Rhythm of the Region in the Wake of the BTC Oil Pipeline". Mr. Aghajanov expressed his concern about Armenia being left out from the project and

brought to the attention of the attendees that the Azerbaijani oil deal may, from an Armenian perspective, unfavorably influence the resolution of the Mountainous Karabakh conflict. According to Aghajanov, "Armenia had but one potential lever against the oil card: democracy."

However, another conference participant, ACNIS analyst Alvard Barkhudarian, made a different argument during a presentation on "Speculations over BTC in the Region and Beyond." Specifically she argued that "the pipeline is a guarantee for regional security and against war." She further argued that, "...it is in Armenia's interests to have its neighbors economically developed and advanced."

The Armenian Parliament also discussed the opening of the BTC oil pipeline and its potential consequences for Armenia and the region. According to a May 27th report by *Arminfo* news agency, the head of the parliamentary faction of the Republican Party of Armenia [RPA], Galust Saakyan stated that, "...the processes happening in the neighboring republic [Azerbaijan] cannot affect the situation in Armenia." According to the same report, Mr. Saakyan said that "...the exploitation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and Azerbaijan's economic development would have a favorable impact on the development of the entire region in general."

The May 27th report from the *Arminfo* news agency also cited Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaktsutyun [ARFD] faction spokesman Levon Mkrtchyan, who stated that "...the neighbors' efforts to sideline Armenia from the regional projects will boomerang against these countries since the difficult situation in which Armenia has found itself, because of its neighbors' fault, hinders the development of the whole of the region." Mr. Mkrtchyan continued, noting that, "... the exploitation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline did not disturb the balance of forces in the region."

Armenia's Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan provided a different analysis. Referencing statements by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev

regarding the future use of BTC oil profits to boost military spending, Margaryan argued that Armenia must take this into account in setting its own military budget. According to a May 26th report by the ARKA news agency, Margaryan stated that Armenia's defense budget in the coming year would be "...as large as possible and necessary."

Mr. Margaryan also argued that "Armenia has to find alternative ways to restore the regional balance of power, an alternative to BTC can be the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline, via which Armenian can transport gas to Europe via Georgia in the future."

Additional commentary was provided by Dr. Vardan Grigoryan, an Armenian historian and political activist. Dr. Grigoryan argued that the opening of the BTC has, in effect, tied the hands of the Azerbaijani government which, as a result, will not be able to use war to resolve the Mountainous Karabakh issue. Dr. Grigoryan stated that "the USA and the oil companies that are acting on its orders have not constructed the Baku-Ceyhan for the benefit of the leadership of Azerbaijan, but to resolve their own geopolitical and geo-economic problems. So transforming any expected economic privilege into military and economic domination for the leadership of Azerbaijan may directly damage USA interests in the region." He further stated that, "For this reason Azerbaijan should forget about any military revenge [against Armenia] and pin its hopes only on the prospect of a peaceful and quiet return of Karabakh." He further argued that the opening of the BTC oil pipeline is going to pressure the Azerbaijani government to democratize before any settlement of the Mountainous Karabakh issue could be accomplished. He concluded his article by saying, "And who should the settlement of this problem start with if not with the Aliyev clan, the power of which has become an obstacle in the way of democratizing of the Caucasus-Central Asia region?" According to him, "...the functioning of the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline does not open the way for a pro-Azerbaijani settlement of the Karabakh issue but simply reveals the big hole that Heydar Aliyev has dug for his son Ilham."

RULING AND OPPOSITION PARTIES IN AZERBAIJAN ENGAGE IN A WAR OF DEMONSTRATIONS

Alman Mir Ismail

Although most of the members of the Parliament and the ruling party in Azerbaijan like to say that the "era of street rallies is over," both the opposition and the ruling parties have recently launched a war of demonstrations. After more than 19 months of prohibition of street rallies, the opposition parties Musavat, Democratic and Popular Front parties were finally allowed to organize a street demonstration on June 4. More than 10,000 people attended the rally cheering for free and fair elections and democracy in the country. They also carried the photos of President Bush, as a sign of support for his recent drive for democracy in the CIS and Middle East. The rally came after a brutal crackdown on opposition activists, trying to stage an unauthorized one on May 21, days before the official launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

The ruling party, YAP, responded with an even bigger rally on June 15, dedicated to the anniversary of former President Heydar Aliyev's arrival from Nakhchivan to Baku in 1993 and his subsequent election to the presidency. The country is officially celebrating this day as "Salvation Day."

Opposition is promising further public protests, with the next ones scheduled for June 16 in Sumgait and June 18 in Baku. The one in Sumgait will be the first outside of Baku since the last election campaign in the summer of 2003. Opposition dailies and political parties are promising a massive influx of people into these demonstrations and claim that these public rallies are indicating of the people's anger and frustration with the ruling regime.

As the election campaign season starts, it appears that the lid on public rallies has been lifted. The change of the Azerbaijani government's policy on the prohibition of public rallies came at a time of intense pressures from the U.S. administration and Euro-Atlantic institutions such as the OSCE and

the Council of Europe, which advocate for free and fair parliamentary elections in the country and the restoration of the right for freedom of assembly. The ban was imposed after the presidential elections in October 2003, when protesting opposition members clashed with police and army and damaged some city infrastructure. One person was killed and hundreds were wounded as a result of the post-election violence at the time.

In reality, however, the authorities were afraid of public disorder and losing control over the political stability in the country. President Ilham Aliyev is still on the path of consolidating his power. Having been re-energized after the Georgian, Ukrainian and Kyrgyz upheavals, the Azerbaijani opposition promises a "velvet revolution" in the country should the elections be fraudulent. The united coalition of major opposition parties have last week decided on the name, color and symbol of their alliance: "Azadlig" (Freedom) and Orange. The similarity with Ukraine and Georgia is obvious. Besides, the Azerbaijani authorities were afraid that dissatisfied segments of the ruling party would use the opposition rallies to destabilize the situation in the country and hinder the reform agenda of President Ilham Aliyev.

At the same time, the lifting of the ban indicates the willingness of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to ensure freer and fairer election processes and the great deal of difficulty that he finds himself in trying to conduct reforms in the country while simultaneously managing the conservative "old guard." The presidential decree on the improvement of the electoral process, passed before the rallies were allowed, also adds credit to the President's performance. Yet, the refusal of the authorities to amend the electoral code so that the composition of the election commissions will change and equally

represent the political forces in the country shows that the election process will not be as smooth as the international community and local opposition parties would hope. In fact, President Aliyev has already submitted the draft of the revised election code to the Parliament for adoption and the Venice commission of the Council of Europe, charged with legislative reforms in a member countries, has expressed its concerns about the composition of the

election commission. The OSCE last month also criticized the election code.

It will remain a critical challenge for President Aliyev to be able to press for further reforms and improvements in the electoral process to avoid a "velvet revolution". Any other steps could lead to further tensions in the country on the eve of elections.

STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE ON NEW SECURITY THREATS IN EURASIA

Emin Poljarevic

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program organized a two-day conference in Stockholm on "New Security Threats in Eurasia". The purpose of the conference was to discuss the combined Euro-Atlantic efforts that would examine and improve the region's capacity to address the emerging security problems.

In an introductory panel on weak states, conflict, and state-building, Dr. Neil Macfarlane noted the growing importance of the Human Security dimension in observing the region, although its definition is often unclear. Dr. Axel Hadenius of Uppsala University noted that in spite of the Third wave of democratization sweeping through the world, there is a flat line of democratic development in the Middle East and Central Asia. He also boldly stated that the colored revolutions so far did not result in measurable democratic improvements. He also noted the controversial issue of religion is not very relevant in explaining the failure of democratic transformation in Eurasia. There is no difference between Christian and Muslim countries in public support for democracy. As Dr. Stephen Blank argued, the possibilities for regional conflict resolution in Central Asia and Caucasus exist, but with Russia supporting criminal proto-states in the Caucasus and Moldova, the outcome is bleak. Dr. Blank elaborated further that Russian neo-imperialism is harming its neighbors, and CIS as a Russian tool to promote its ideas is all too weak.

The second panel assessed Eurasian security prospects. Dr. Frederick Starr claimed that the security threats

are not understood and interpreted correctly. Tension between *analysts* vs. *advocates* of regional security projects will take time to develop. Threats such as ethnic conflict, warlordism and drug trade are destabilizing the region. According to Dr. Starr, in spite of the problems, these issues are not fundamentally destabilizing the region; neither is an economic crisis taking place. Long-term threats that are remaining after discarding the abovementioned threats are poverty in the rural areas, corruption that has become endemic, the so-called democratization deficiency, and the radicalization of religious groups. The situation in the Caucasus is rather different. Dr. Alexander Rondeli spoke about the future increase of territorial conflicts in the area: Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya- secessionists have achieved partial victory. The political solution has very little prospect in the region. On a sobering note, Rondeli stated that the main lesson Caucasian governments had drawn from a decade of unresolved conflict was that the only way to solve their problems was through force. Analyzing the sources of conflict, he mentioned that there are many, ranging from the lack of positive political development to structural factors such as post/neo- colonialism to external and internal factors. In other words, a Russian ambition to extend and strengthen its influence in the south Caucasus is one of the major destabilizing factors. Another is the ethno-political dimension, which is deteriorated by the external involvement.

The Northern Caucasus security situation is more unstable than ever before. Dr. Emin Pain spoke on the

spread of conflict intensity from Chechnya to Dagestan where organized resistance has taken the form of non-traditional Islamic structures driven by the so-called Wahhabi ideology. Kabardino-Balkaria is another area where official statistics show about 400 Wahhabi fighters mobilized against the Russian forces. However, the levels of penetration and number of attacks show that their numbers is much higher.

Ms. Zeyno Baran inaugurated the third panel on energy and economic security by bringing forward Turkey's pivotal role in the future of the European energy supplies, as gas from Caucasus and Central Asia will be transported via Turkey into Europe. The discussion of Turkey's future EU membership has thus received another dimension. Ms. Isabel Murray presented the general picture of the Russian-European energy interdependence. She held that the promotion of market policies, encouraging transparency and support of reform movements within Russia, with strong encouragement of investment projects, is the way to go. The ultimate goal, according to Ms. Murray, is reducing the EU's energy dependency on OPEC. The Caspian region and Russia are future sources of European energy. Dr Mamuka Tsereteli, on the other hand, noted that there is both an opportunity and a need for the EU to dramatically reduce its dependence on Russian gas, as Russia cannot deliver Europe's future energy demands. He further stated that "Europe needs to expand its economic markets for competitiveness, products and consumers". The Caucasian energy transportation corridor (Baku-Ceyhan-Tbilisi pipeline) is evidence of the diversification of European energy supply. A greater European involvement in the Caucasus and Central Asia would strengthen the states' independence, and is absolutely required for the development of these states as well as international stability, according to Dr. Tsereteli. Dr. Gareth Winrow concurred, maintaining the importance of the BTC pipeline, but pointing out that rapid development is necessary in order for the EU to fulfill its energy needs on time.

Another important security aspect covered in the conference's third panel was narcotics and organized crime. As widely known, Afghanistan is the world's biggest producer of opium. This great security threat has increased dramatically during last decade. Afghanistan can offer 500 metric tones of morphine and heroin to the world market yearly. The prices are

also varying, the trafficker on the border of Afghanistan can buy 1 kilo of heroin for \$3,500, and the same kilo in Stockholm will cost at least \$100,000. Dr. Vladimir Fenopetov's and the UNODOC's calculation show that ca 25% of the trafficked drugs reach Europe. With those numbers in mind it is easy to realize that Afghanistan in many ways is a narcostate, as more than half of national economy comes from drug-related activity. Dr. Louise Shelley also mentioned the increased role of organized crime networks in the political development of Eurasia. She mentioned the link between crime and terrorism, not only in Central Asia but also in Russia and the Caucasus. Dr. Trifin Roule elaborated further on the topic of organized crime, mentioning the money laundering aspect as another security dimension. He also pointed out the difficult of controlling the predominantly cash-based economies of the region, thus preventing the tracking of illegal funds and illegal finances invested in legal parts of the economy.

The final aspect discussed in the conference was the threat of terrorism. Dr. Svante Cornell initiated by pointing out the correlation between drugs trafficking and conflict, thus forming the crime-terror nexus. Dr. Magnus Ranstorp explained the multi-faceted causes of terrorist activity, mentioning among other lack of democracy, failed/weak states, lack of capacity to control borders, state repression, rapid economic transformation, extremist ideologies, etc. Dr. Abdujabar Abduvakhitov nevertheless disagreed with Dr. Ranstorp by elaborating on terrorism as a global phenomenon, focusing his analysis of the causes to extremist ideology as the most important reason for terrorism. Furthermore, Dr. Pavel Baev discussed effort to reduce the terrorist threat as a point of departure for Vladimir Putin's entire domestic politics. According to Dr. Baev, terrorism is a threat to Russia, solely linked to Chechnya. He states that the term counter-terrorism has much wider meaning in Russia, and essentially defines Putin's system of power.

Wrapping up the conference, Dr. Starr filled the remaining gaps and concluded that Western passion for democratic representation is a serious force of instability in the region, adding nationalism as one of important causes of insecurity in Eurasia.

[Note: the conference proceedings will be published shortly on this website.]

NEWS DIGEST

UZBEKISTAN AGAINST INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATION IN ANDIZHAN

2 June

Uzbek authorities object to the establishment of an international commission to investigate the recent events in Andizhan. "Uzbekistan thinks that appeals for forming an international commission to investigate the Andizhan events are unfounded," says an Uzbek Foreign Ministry statement released in Tashkent on Thursday. A number of international organizations, including the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, have called for the international participation in the Andizhan investigation. "The preliminary information shows that the tragic events in Andizhan resulted from a deliberate and well planned terrorist aggression of radical, extremist and religious forces guided from abroad. These forces goal was the liquidation of the constitutional system and the secular and democratic way of development chosen by the people of Uzbekistan," the statement runs. (Interfax)

BISHKEK BUSINESSMEN PICKETING GOVT BUILDING

2 June

A number of Bishkek businessmen engaged in trade, whose businesses sustained damages during violence and looting in the city early on March 25, staged a picket near the Kyrgyz government building on Thursday. About 70 protesters demanded that the government address the extension of loans granted to their businesses by commercial banks, the deferment of tax and customs duty payments, and the restoration of their licenses that were stolen or destroyed on March 25. "Leaseholders at Bishkek's major shopping centers suffered damages varying from \$5,000 to \$100,000," picket activists told Interfax. (Interfax)

KAZAKH, RUSSIAN PRESIDENTS MARK BAIKONUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY

2 March

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev attended a ceremony on 2 June at the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan to mark that facility's 50th anniversary. In remarks at the ceremony, Putin thanked Nazarbaev for "a principled, far-sighted policy" that will permit Russia

to lease the launch facility until 2050. The two also laid the cornerstone for the planned Baiterek space center, "Kazakhstan Today" reported. Russia has leased Baikonur for \$115 million a year since 1994. (ITAR-TASS)

RUSSIAN ENVOY SEEKS TO ALLAY AZERBAIJANI CONCERNS OVER ARMS

2 June

Russian charge d'affaires in Baku Petr Burdykin handed to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry on 2 June a response from the Russian Foreign Ministry to Baku's expression of concern at the redeployment to Armenia of weaponry withdrawn from Russian military bases in Georgia. Burdykin stressed that the arms in question will remain under Russian control, and he rejected as "an invention" the suggestion that they would be made available to the Armenian armed forces. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI AUTHORITIES WITHHOLD PERMISSION FOR OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATION

2 June

Baku municipal authorities rejected on 2 June a request by three opposition parties to stage a rally and march on 4 June in the city center but gave the green light for holding the event at a motorcycle racetrack on the outskirts of the city. Deputy Baku police chief Yashar Aliev summoned the organizers of the planned rally to warn them that police would intervene to prevent it being held in the original venue, but the three parties subsequently issued a statement reaffirming their intention to congregate as originally planned at the 28 May metro station, the site of a similar rally that was broken up by police two weeks ago. (Turan)

CHECHEN TERRORISTS INVOLVED IN UZBEK RIOTING - LAVROV

2 June

Russia possesses information indicating that Chechen terrorists were involved in the recent rioting in Uzbekistan, said Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. "We have information that Islamic extremists, structures of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, remnants of the Taliban, and some

Chechen terrorists were involved in this," Lavrov said at a press conference in Vladivostok, referring to the May 13 rioting in the southern Uzbek city of Andizhan. The Russian, Chinese, and Indian foreign ministers discussed the situation in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, at a meeting in Vladivostok on Thursday, Lavrov said. (Interfax)

ALKHANOV DENIES 'CHECHEN TRACE' IN UZBEKISTAN EVENTS

3 June

Chechen President Alu Alkhanov has denied a so-called Chechen trace in the recent events in Uzbekistan. "There is no Chechen trace in Uzbekistan," Alkhanov told the press in Pushkin outside St. Petersburg on Friday, commenting on Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's remark on involvement of Chechen terrorists in the Andizhan events. Alkhanov did not deny that "Chechens could have been there [in Uzbekistan] as well as members of other ethnic groups." "I know that they have nothing in common with the Chechen republic or the Chechen people," Alkhanov said. He reiterated, however, that he has no information confirming that Chechen residents were involved in the conflict in Uzbekistan. (Interfax)

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT ISSUES TERROR WARNING ON UZBEKISTAN

3 June

In a 2 June travel warning posted to the U.S. State Department's official website (<http://www.state.gov>), the State Department authorized the departure of non-emergency personnel and family members of U.S. Embassy personnel from Uzbekistan and urged U.S. citizens to leave the country because of possible terror attacks in the near future. "The United States Government has received information that terrorist groups are planning attacks, possibly against U.S. interests, in Uzbekistan in the very near future," the warning noted. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZSTAN TO CONSIDER REFUGEE STATUS FOR UZBEK CITIZENS

6 June

The Kyrgyz authorities are considering Uzbek citizens' requests for refugee status, First Deputy Foreign Minister Taalai Kadyrov told a press briefing on Monday. "The Kyrgyz authorities will see how Uzbek citizens, who are temporarily staying in the republic, correspond to the refugee status," he said. The Kyrgyz and Uzbek foreign ministers had consultations in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh on

June 4, he said. "Kyrgyzstan may deny the refugee status to individuals suspected of illegal actions, if they are not political," Kadyrov said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ PROSECUTORS ISSUE WARRANT FOR FORMER PREMIER

7 June

Acting Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov told Kyrgyzstan's parliament on 6 June that the Prosecutor-General's Office has issued an order for the arrest of former Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. One charge against Tanaev, who is currently in Russia, involves alleged abuse of office involving 40 million soms (\$977,000) in state funds that were allegedly transferred to a company controlled by Tanaev's son. Beknazarov said an investigative group will depart for Russia to interrogate Tanaev and attempt to arrange his return to Kyrgyzstan to face charges. Gazeta.ru reported on 6 June that an attempt to extradite Tanaev could create difficulties in Russian-Kyrgyz relations. In a possible premonition of those difficulties, Konstantin Zatulin, the head of the Russian State Duma's CIS Committee, told the online newspaper that the criminal case against Tanaev is a "political case" connected with the 10 July presidential election in Kyrgyzstan. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRO-PRESIDENTIAL PARTIES FORM BLOC

7 June

The pro-presidential Democratic Party and Asar party are forming a political bloc, but will remain separate organizations. "We want to start pooling our efforts and invite other political parties who support reforms and the advancement of our political system without revolutions to join us," Democratic Party leader Maksut Narikbayev told reporters during an interval in an extraordinary party congress in Astana on Tuesday. Asar party is holding a similar congress in the same city. Narikbayev stressed that the two parties will remain independent. "There is no question of a merger today, although it is possible in the future," he said. The new bloc will support President Nursultan Nazarbayev in the upcoming presidential elections, he said. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

HRW: UZBEK CRACKDOWN A 'MASSACRE'

7 June

Uzbekistan's crackdown on protesters in Andijan last month was a "massacre", according to Human Rights Watch, in the fullest report yet on the bloodshed. The US-based rights group called for Washington and the

EU to suspend links with the Uzbek government until it allows an independent investigation. Tashkent says only 173 people, mainly Islamic militants, died in the protest. But eyewitnesses say hundreds of protesters were killed when troops opened fire on Andijan's main square. "The scale of this killing was so extensive, and its nature was so indiscriminate and disproportionate, that it can best be described as a massacre," Human Rights Watch [HRW] said in its report, presented at a press conference in Moscow on Tuesday. The group's assessment was based on interviews with more than 50 witnesses, most of which had fled to Kyrgyzstan. As has been reported previously, HRW said the huge protest was sparked by the trial of 23 local businessmen on charges of religious extremism and the subsequent freeing of those men and other prisoners by armed locals on the night of 12 May. But it said there was no evidence that the protest was motivated by an Islamist agenda, as alleged by the government. "Interviews with numerous people present at the demonstrations consistently revealed that the protesters spoke about economic conditions in Andijan, government repression, and unfair trials - and not the creation of an Islamic state. People were shouting 'Ozodliq!' ['Freedom'] and not 'Allahu Akbar' ['God is Great']," HRW said. Witnesses told the group that they massed in Andijan's main square, calling for freedom and justice, and were then gunned down by government troops after the square was sealed off. The protesters tried to flee the square, and fled north, but found their way blocked and came under heavy fire near School 15, the report said. HRW said that, on the basis of its interviews with witnesses, it believed hundreds of people died during the 13 May crackdown. The Uzbek embassy in London did not respond to a request for an interview regarding the HRW report. (BBC)

FOUR DIE IN AFGHAN BASE ATTACKS

8 June

Militants have killed two US soldiers and two Pakistani lorry drivers in attacks on bases in south-eastern Afghanistan, near the Pakistani border. A missile hit the US base at Shkin as troops were about to unload a transport helicopter, killing two. Eight people were also wounded in the attack. The drivers were shot dead as they left another US base at Spin Boldak. Taliban militants claimed both attacks, saying they meant to cut supply routes for US-led forces in the country. American warplanes were scrambled after the attack at Shkin, in Paktika province, but were unable to locate the attackers, the US military told AFP news agency. Nearly 150 US troops have been killed in Afghanistan since the start of the US

intervention in late 2001 to overthrow the Taliban regime and its Islamist allies. Taliban spokesman Abdul Latif Hakimi told AFP that the militants had begun firing rockets at the Shkin base on Tuesday night, with the last one launched on Wednesday morning. A US military spokesman, Lt Col Jerry O'Hara, confirmed that two soldiers were killed and eight "military service members and civilians" were wounded by what he called a mortar bomb. Police in Spin Boldak said they had arrested five people after the attack on the drivers, who had been leaving the base in a convoy after delivering fuel. Speaking for the Taliban, Mr Hakimi said anyone working for the US would be regarded as a target. (BBC)

BAKU RESPONSE TO RUSSIAN ARMS TRANSFER POLITICALLY MOTIVATED - OPINION

8 June

Baku's negative response to the transfer of Russian military hardware from Georgia to Armenia has political rather than military motives, head of the Armenian parliamentary defense, national security, and internal affairs commission Mger Shakhgeldian told Interfax on Wednesday. "The Russian military bases in Armenia are a component of the republic's national security," he said. "Armenia is interested in developing a regional security system in the South Caucasus," Shakhgeldian said. "The international community has taken quite a positive view of the idea to set up a regional security system in the South Caucasus in the future, and we believe it is possible and necessary to build such a structure in the future," he said. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI POLICEMAN DISMISSED FOR ASSAULTING JOURNALIST

8 June

The police officer who assaulted Farid Teymurkhanli, a reporter for the independent daily "Ayna/Zerkalo," during the unsanctioned 21 May opposition demonstration in Baku has been dismissed, Interior Minister Ramil Usubov told Turan. Teymurkhanli, who suffered a concussion after a blow to the head, has asked the Prosecutor-General's Office to bring criminal charges against the police officer in question, whose name Usubov did not divulge. (Turan)

FOUR GEORGIANS FEARED KIDNAPPED IN SOUTH OSSETIA

8 June

A meeting between Georgian and South Ossetian officials was scheduled in Tskhinvali on 8 June to

discuss the disappearance two days earlier in the South Ossetian conflict zone of four Georgian men. Georgian media alleged on 7 June that the four men were kidnapped in a reprisal for the shooting by Georgian police on 29 May of four Ossetians but South Ossetian Interior Minister Mikhail Mindzaev denied on 7 June the four men were kidnapped. The ethnically mixed peacekeeping forces deployed in the conflict zone imposed additional security measures on 8 June. (RFE/RL)

EVENTS IN UZBEKISTAN ORGANIZED FROM AFGHANISTAN - IVANOV

9 June

Russia has credible information that the recent disturbances in the Uzbek town of Andizhan were organized from Afghan territory, said Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov. "Our information is quite reliable: everything that happened in Andizhan was inspired from Afghan territory," Ivanov said at a session of the Russian-NATO Council on Thursday. "A group of armed militants from Islamic organizations, including [Taliban members], had been planning a raid on Uzbekistan for a long time. So the questions the investigation has to answer are who organized the riots, how, and who assisted them," Ivanov said. "Ultimately, we are talking about stopping the threat of international terrorism in this strategically important region," he said. Ivanov noted that terrorist training continues in Afghanistan. "As we know, terrorists are being purposefully trained in Afghanistan for export," Ivanov said, adding that "the recent events in Uzbekistan are a clear confirmation of this." "In general, the situation in Afghanistan is still far from what we could call stable," Ivanov said. (Interfax)

UZBEKISTAN SKIPS NATO MEET AS RUSSIA RESISTS PROBE

9 June

Uzbekistan declined to send its defence minister to a NATO ministerial meeting on Thursday, and a NATO official said the alliance was reviewing its ties with the country following killings there last month. But Russia resisted NATO calls for an independent inquiry into the deaths of at least 173 people. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov refused to condemn Tashkent for the killings by troops who opened fire to quell an uprising. Uzbekistan is a member of NATO's Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and entitled to attend such meetings, but the official said Tashkent had sent a message saying the defence minister could not attend due to other commitments. The former

Soviet Uzbekistan says most of those killed in the eastern town of Andizhan were terrorists. The independent Human Rights Watch said it as a massacre in which Uzbek troops fired indiscriminately on a crowd. NATO followed the United Nations in urging Tashkent to allow an independent international inquiry, which Uzbekistan rejected. The alliance's Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer raised the issue with Ivanov at a meeting between NATO and Russia, but made it clear their views were miles apart. "I cannot say we agree on all elements because we do not agree," he told a news conference. "On the point of NATO joining the international chorus for an independent international inquiry, that is not the Russian position." He said, "We are also concerned by this, but in contrast to others we do not intend to condemn or accuse anyone. We are not going to come to any hasty conclusions about what happened." Two NATO members, the United States and Germany, have leased airbases and facilities at Khanabad and Termez in Uzbekistan, and use them to support peacekeeping operations in neighbouring Afghanistan. So far NATO has stopped short of threatening to suspend its "partnership for peace" accord with Tashkent, an arrangement it has with several other ex-Soviet states. However, following the killings in Andizhan, NATO has already postponed some seminars and other meetings with Uzbekistan to make the point it was not business as usual. (Reuters)

GEORGIA SOLICITS SOUTH OSSETIANS' HELP IN RELEASING HOSTAGES

9 June

Georgian Deputy Interior Minister Bidzina Bregadze told journalists in Tbilisi on 8 June that both the Georgian and the South Ossetian authorities know the identity of the people who abducted four Georgians in the South Ossetian conflict zone two days earlier. For that reason, Bregadze said, the Georgian police will not launch an operation to try to free the four men but have asked the South Ossetian Interior Ministry to do so. Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava traveled to Tskhinvali on 8 June to discuss the abduction with the commander of the Russian peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone, Caucasus Press reported. Also on 8 June, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement commending the work of the Joint Control Commission and the peacekeeping forces and calling on both Georgia and South Ossetia to demonstrate restraint. The statement urged that a meeting between the two sides' interior ministers to discuss the situation be held as soon as possible. (RFE/RL)

ABKHAZ OFFICIALS REJECT DEPLOYMENT OF UN POLICE IN GALI

9 June

During talks in Sukhum on 7 June with Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, who is UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special representative for the Abkhaz conflict, Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh rejected as inexpedient the proposed deployment in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion of UN police officers. He claimed that Abkhaz police are taking measures to crack down on crime in Gali. On 27 May, the Georgian daily "Rezonansi" quoted a Georgian crime expert as saying that 238 people have been killed in Gali over the past two years, and robberies, kidnappings, and the hijacking of cars and buses are also frequent. Visiting Gali on 2 June, Bagapsh attributed the high crime rate to infiltration by criminal elements across the River Inguri, which forms the internal border between the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia. During his talks with Tagliavini, Bagapsh also rejected her proposal to open a UN Human Rights Office in Gali, saying that such an office already exists in Sukhum, Caucasus Press reported. Tagliavini told journalists in Tbilisi on 8 June she will continue to push for the opening of a Human Rights office in Gali. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ LAWMAKER ASSASSINATED

10 June

A leading Kyrgyz parliamentarian and businessman was shot dead close to the main government building in the capital, Bishkek, police said, highlighting instability in the ex-Soviet state. The assassination comes a month before a presidential election to vote for a successor to President Askar Akayev who was ousted after violent protests against a flawed parliamentary poll earlier this year. Police chief Omurbek Suvanaliyev named the parliamentarian as Zhirgalbek Surabaldiyev, but gave no further details. "There could be various motives for this crime ranging from redistribution of property to politics," said parliamentarian Kubatbek Baibolov, who ran to the scene with 30 other deputies from the nearby parliament building. "The criminal world feels the weakness of state power and so they start feeling like masters in our house." A corpse covered with a white cloth lay on the pavement. Police could be seen holding a pistol -- apparently the murder weapon -- in a transparent plastic bag. Criminal violence is common in Kyrgyzstan, an impoverished Central Asian state on China's border. Surabaldiyev owned the country's biggest second-hand car market, a significant

business interest. He was also the head of the Kyrgyzstan Business Union, a grouping of entrepreneurs. Surabaldiyev's driver was injured in the attack and the window of his Toyota Landcruiser was smashed. (AP)

CHECHEN AMBUSH KILLS SEVEN POLICE

10 June

Seven Russian police officers have been killed in an ambush in Chechnya. The Russian interior ministry said the attack happened near Kurchaloi, south-east of the capital, Grozny. The men's vehicle came under fire from a grenade launcher. The driver survived and is being treated for shrapnel wounds. Raids by Chechen separatist rebels remain frequent in the North Caucasus republic, which has been devastated by a decade of war. The seven officers killed in the attack were all from the Tver region of central Russia. The local Chechen prosecutor's office told a Russian news agency it was the worst attack in recent months. (BBC)

ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER MEETS WITH VISITING TURKISH LEGISLATOR

10 June

Artur Baghdasarian met on 10 June with Turkish parliamentarian Turhan Comez (Justice and Development Party, AKP), who headed a delegation of journalists and politicians making an unofficial visit to Armenia. Baghdasarian stressed that Armenia seeks to establish normal relations with all neighboring countries, and he proposed resolving problems in bilateral relations by means of joint discussions. Baghdasarian urged Ankara to "have the courage to acknowledge the 1915 genocide" as a preliminary to moving forward on the road to European integration. Comez, for his part, described his visit to Armenia as a step on that road and noted that Turkish-Armenian discussions are important not merely per se but in order to strengthen regional relations. (Noyan Tapan)

UN CONDEMNS KYRGYZ RETURN OF UZBEK ASYLUM SEEKERS

13 June

The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) has "expressed shock at the deportation of four Uzbek men from Kyrgyzstan and urged the Kyrgyz authorities to halt further deportations of Uzbek asylum seekers until they have gone through proper procedures to determine whether or not they are refugees under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention," according to a 10 June press release on the organization's website (<http://www.unhcr.ch>).

UNHCR spokeswoman Jennifer Pagonis called the deportations "a direct violation of an agreement UNHCR had reached with the Kyrgyz government." The UNHCR identified the four men as Dilshod Hadjiev, Tavakal Hadjiev, Abdubais Hasan Shakirov, and Muhammad Kadyrov and suggested they are now "presumably in the custody of Uzbek authorities." Acting Kyrgyz First Deputy Prime Minister Feliks Kulov told journalists in Bishkek that the case should be investigated if, in fact, the handover took place, Kabar reported. Carlos Zaccagnini, UNHCR's head of mission in Kyrgyzstan, told Reuters that the four were part of a group of 16 asylum seekers who had earlier been removed by Kyrgyz authorities from a camp housing nearly 500 Uzbek asylum seekers. Edil Baisalov, head of the NGO coalition For Democracy and Civil Society, condemned the handover and called for the resignation of Tashtemir Aitbaev, head of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Agency, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. (RFE/RL)

SECURITY GUARDS FIRE ON KYRGYZSTAN MARKET TRADERS

13 June

Security guards outside a hotel opened fire on hundreds of market traders who had come to the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh Monday to demand fair market practices, police said. Four people were wounded. About 350 people, half of them women, came from the border town of Kara-Suu to demonstrate against Bayaman Erkinbayev, an Osh-based legislator who is connected to the market in their town. They were confronted by a crowd of about 150 people outside the Alay Hotel, believed to be owned by Erkinbayev. Erkinbayev's supporters wore white T-shirts with a portrait of the legislator and held Kyrgyz state flags, police said. They said four Erkinbayev supporters fired at the crowd after the two groups threw Molotov cocktails at each other. A spokesman for the Osh regional police, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said it was not clear why the guards had started shooting. He said four men shot at the crowd with assault rifles. Three people were hospitalized following the incident, and police cited witnesses as saying one other person was injured. Police closed off the area around the hotel after the incident and said order had been restored. Police were looking for suspects in the violence. The Kara-Suu market also was the site of reported unrest Thursday, when about 150 people armed with sticks and shouting slogans against Erkinbayev stormed an administrative building and beat up the guards. Erkinbayev, a key figure behind the March protests that overthrew the

former regime of President Askar Akayev, runs an array of businesses in southern Kyrgyzstan. He also is well-known for his achievements as a wrestler. He was wounded and shot in the nose by unknown assailants in April. He claimed the attack was linked to his plans at the time to run for president in July, but prosecutors said the shooting wasn't likely to have had political motives. Still, politics and business are deeply intertwined in Kyrgyzstan, where the Akayev regime was widely accused of corruption and trying to take over lucrative businesses. (AP)

UZBEK PRESIDENT MEETS WITH RUSSIAN POLITICAL ANALYSTS

13 June

Uzbek President Islam Karimov met on 10 June in Tashkent with a delegation of Russian political analysts led by Politika foundation head Vyacheslav Nikonov. Noting that Uzbekistan is currently under "information attack," Karimov told the Russian analysts, "I am confident in your unbiased and objective evaluation of the issues." After a tour of Andijon, Nikonov said, "The numbers of victims of the tragic events in Andijon that some foreign media have provided are clearly exaggerated." The Russian delegation also included Sergei Markov, director of the Center for Political Studies; Vitalii Tretyakov, editor in chief of the magazine "Politicheskii klass"; Rafael Guseinov, first deputy editor in chief of the newspaper "Trud"; and Nurali Latypov, an adviser to Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov. (RFE/RL)

CART EXPLODES IN TAJIK CAPITAL

13 June

An explosion took place in Dushanbe on 13 June outside the Emergency Situations Ministry and the Savings Bank of Tajikistan, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. Avesta quoted law-enforcement sources as saying that the blast force was equal to 50-100 grams of TNT equivalent. Dushanbe prosecutor Habibullah Vohidov said a cart of the sort used to haul goods at local bazaars exploded; he stressed that no one was killed. Interior Minister Humdin Sharifov told reporters that he could not rule out the possibility that the explosion was a terror attack, Reuters reported. The National Security Ministry (MNB) announced in an official statement that the cart's driver has been detained. A powerful explosion rocked the same location in Dushanbe in late January, killing one person. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHS 'NOT READY FOR DEMOCRACY'

14 June

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev has warned of the destabilising effects of importing Western-style democracy too rapidly to central Asia. Speaking at the opening of a summit on foreign investment in Almaty, he said democracy should be learned over time. His remarks follow a wave of popular uprisings in the region, including neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Regional leaders have accused the US or unnamed foreign powers of encouraging the protest movements. The international conference on foreign investment was organised in Almaty, Kazakhstan, by America's prestigious Asia Society. President Nazarbayev said his country welcomed investment in the growing Caspian Sea oil industry and other economic sectors. But he said that western partners should not, as he put it, try to introduce their principles 100% into Kazakhstan. Democracy, he said, was a culture which society had to learn over time. Mr Nazarbayev repeated his assertion that the best way to bring prosperity and stability to central Asia would be to recreate an economic union with open borders for people and capital. (BBC)

KAZAKH EX-MINISTER SENTENCED FOR LIBEL

14 June

A court in Almaty on 13 June ordered former Information Minister Altynbek Sarsenbaev to pay 1 million tenges (\$7,500) in damages for defaming Khabar Agency. Khabar had initially sought 50 million tenges in damages. Sarsenbaev must also publicly retract the comments he made in a 1 October 2004 interview with the opposition newspaper "Respublika" in which he alleged that Khabar was part of a monopolistic media holding controlled by Darigha Nazarbaeva, daughter of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, the Navigator website (<http://www.navi.kz>) reported. "I think that the court's decision is connected with the upcoming presidential elections," Sarsenbaev, co-chairman of the unregistered opposition party Naghyz Ak Zhol, commented after the ruling. He said that if repression against opposition figures continues, "there will be no need to export revolution [to Kazakhstan]; a revolution will take place inside the country." Sarsenbaev vowed to appeal the ruling. He has 15 days to do so. (RFE/RL)

COURT UPHOLDS DECISION, STRIPS AKAYEV'S DAUGHTER OF MANDATE

14 June

Pervomaisky district court in Bishkek has declined

the lawsuit of Bermet Akayeva, the daughter of the former Kyrgyz president, to invalidate the decision of the Central Elections Commission stripping her of her mandate. Her lawyer Svetlana Sorokina told Interfax on Tuesday that on Monday evening the court upheld the decision of the Central Elections Commission. "Akayeva's lawyers and Akayeva herself are dissatisfied with the ruling of the district court and plan to protest it in the Supreme Court within 10 days," she said. (Interfax)

CRIMINAL CONFLICT OR OWNERSHIP DISPUTE BEHIND KYRGYZ DEPUTY'S DEATH

14 June

The Kyrgyz National Security Service has narrowed the range of possible motives behind the June 10 murder of deputy Zhyrgalbek Surabaldiyev to two, service chief Tashtemir Aitbayev told a parliamentary session on Tuesday. "The investigation centers on a criminal dispute theory as well as a theory linked to ownership disagreements over one of the republic's car markets [Surabaldiyev owned a car market]," Aitbayev said. The investigation has established that the deputy was murdered by two young men of Asian and European appearance, who fled the scene of the crime in a white Mercedes car, which was found burnt outside Bishkek on June 11, he said. "The investigation has established that the car was stolen from a Kazakh citizen. We have contacted our Kazakh colleagues and hope that investigators will be able to question the car's owner, who lives in Almaty, today," he said. More than 80 people have been questioned about Surabaldiyev's murder over the past two days, Aitbayev said. "The parliamentarian's entourage has been examined, the number of suspects has been established and three of them have been detained and are being held at the National Security Service's pre-trial detention facility," he said. "Unfortunately, many people from Surabaldiyev's entourage had problems with the law, and some of them have now been placed on the wanted list," Aitbayev said. "The National Security Service's most efficient officers" are engaged in the investigation, he said. (Interfax)

EU GIVES UZBEKISTAN DEADLINE, THREATENS SANCTIONS

14 June

European Union foreign ministers on Monday threatened to scale back ties with Uzbekistan unless the central Asian state allows an independent probe into recent bloodshed by the end of June. The

ministers also urged Uzbekistan to allow the 25-nation bloc's human rights official to visit eastern regions of the former Soviet republic, where some 500 people are reported to have been killed when troops put down a revolt on May 13. President Islam Karimov has refused an independent international inquiry into the killings and Tashkent has refused an entry visa for the envoy. "The Council (EU ministers) urges the Uzbek authorities to reconsider their position by the end of June 2005," the ministers said in a statement. They said EU services would follow closely the situation in Uzbekistan and "they will keep under review the case for a partial suspension of cooperation mechanisms between the EU and Uzbekistan." The statement added that any EU measures would be meant to spare the Uzbek population, which could mean that the bloc was considering a freeze in diplomatic ties or travel ban for government officials rather than trade sanctions. Violence erupted last month in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley. Tashkent has said 173 people, mostly "bandits" or "terrorists" died. Witnesses say more than 500 people, mostly civilians were killed when troops moved to end the protest at what many people saw as an unfair trial of local businessmen. EU ministers created the post of the bloc's special envoy to central Asia on Monday, seeking to increase its influence in the region in wake of unrest in Uzbekistan. Russian-speaking Slovakian diplomat Jan Kubis is favorite for the job. (Reuters)

UZBEKISTAN GROUP CALLS FOR REFORM
14 June

An opposition group in Uzbekistan has written to the US secretary of state asking for Washington to press for economic reform in the republic. The recently formed Sunshine Uzbekistan Coalition says the government's bloody suppression of a protest in Andijan last month shocked Uzbek citizens. The coalition called for economic reforms to prevent a drift towards extremism. Sunshine Uzbekistan appeared on the Uzbek political scene only in April. Now the group has written to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice calling on Washington and other countries to support its programme for economic reforms in Uzbekistan. Without what the letter describes as "forceful intervention" by the US and the world community, it says that repressive Uzbek government policies will continue to radicalise the population, increasing support for extremists. Sunshine Uzbekistan is led by Sanjar Umarov, an Uzbek businessman with strong ties to the United States. The coalition was set up by a group of businessmen and human rights workers who say that economic reforms are essential to prevent this Central Asian nation from sinking into poverty and radicalism. Human rights groups and witnesses say as many as 500 people died. The government says only 173 were killed. Sunshine Uzbekistan disputed the government's assertion that those who were killed were Islamic terrorists. Their letter said the Andijan protest was supported by peaceful citizens who had lost faith in their government, and it accused Tashkent of criminal responsibility for the loss of life. (BBC)

