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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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

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

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

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

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

Svante E. Cornell

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BANNED IN RUSSIA: THE POLITICS OF GEORGIAN WINES

Mamuka Tsereteli

Russia's ongoing campaign to intimidate independent-minded governments in its neighborhood has taken a new twist. Targeting Georgia and Moldova, Russia has banned imports of their wines to Russia's substantial wine market. Any Russian historian would have counseled against this action, as both the images and the results are not what Russia's new imperialists seek. For Georgians, they have seen it all before. Foreign invaders of the tiny country have often attempted to use the "wine weapon" to bring Georgians to heel, usually by burning or otherwise eradicating Georgia's famous vines. Arabs, Turks, Mongols, Persians all tried this. The surviving several hundred different unique Georgian grape varieties are proof of their "success".

BACKGROUND: In late March-early April, Russian authorities banned imports of Georgian and Moldovan wines under the pretext that they do not meet Russian consumer standards. This decision follows a similar demarche in December 2005, when Russia's Ministry of Agriculture imposed temporary restrictions on imports of agricultural products from Georgia to Russia. At that time, Russia banned Georgia's citrus products, which indeed caused serious harm to Georgian producers. Next, in January 2006, murky "terrorists"—according to Russian investigators—simultaneously blew up two natural gas pipelines and one high voltage electricity line inside Russian territory that supplied Georgia with significant amounts of energy, leaving Georgia without natural gas and electricity during the coldest winter of the last several decades. Georgians have long had to deal with Russia's support for separatist movements in their country, which in recent months have moved toward outright annexation of Georgian territory by Russia. Conspiracy theorists might see a pattern in all this.

It is no secret that Russia is a primary market for agricultural products from Georgia, Moldova and many other countries. Wine is Georgia's second largest export product and constitutes up to 10 percent of its total exports. So far this year, approximately 70 percent of all exported Georgian wines were sold in Russia. Dependence is even higher in case of Moldova, where wine production provides 25 percent of GDP. Thus a negative impact on the economies of those states is

inevitable. Of course, this is the strategy of Russia's leaders, who know perfectly well that most counterfeit Georgian wines appearing on the Russian market are produced on the territory of Russian Federation itself. They also know that Georgian producers and farmers use no chemical fertilizers and pesticides, that in fact their quality standards are higher than Russia's own and those of most other countries. Indeed, among Russian consumers, the broad range of agricultural products from Georgia are known for their natural taste and quality.

IMPLICATIONS: Russia's wine offensive is both childish and counterproductive. Along with Georgian farmers, those most damaged will undoubtedly be Russian consumers, who over several centuries have cultivated a taste for Georgian wines over all others. Moldova and Georgia in 2005 accounted for 65 percent of Russia's wine imports – Moldovan wines some 56 percent, providing wines primarily for the low and middle income segment of the market; Georgian wines about 9 percent. Two thirds of the Russian wine market has hence been closed, indicating the Russian government's lack of concern not only for Georgian and Moldovan producers but for its own consumers, importers, and retailers. If this ban continues, Russian consumers will be forced to switch to higher priced European wines, or to low quality, health-threatening vodka. This does not mean that a "vine revolution" will happen in Russia, but separating Russians from

their drink is unlikely to be a winning political strategy.

On the larger playing field, the hopes of Russian leaders that embargoing Georgian wines will cause irreparable damage to the Georgian economy—and, consequently, force Georgia to sue for peace on Russia's terms—are likely to be unfulfilled. The Georgian economy will survive, as it did earlier when marauders far more skilled than the Russians tried to shut it down. And in the longer-term, Russia's interests in the South Caucasus are likely to be even further damaged.

In the short term, Russia's wine embargo can result in serious economic consequences for Georgia. But Georgia's wine producers will re-adjust, start aging their wines, find new markets, produce grape alcohol and brandy and thus still survive this hard blow. The broader political consequences for Russia are harder to measure but could be significant. The first arena is likely to be the WTO. Russia's use of energy as a lever of political pressure against its neighbors – mainly Ukraine – was a wake-up call to both North American and European governments. The wine ban clearly shows that Russia is behaving in a manner inconsistent with the rules of WTO membership. Coming only months after the Ukrainian conflict, Russia's moves are not likely to improve its prospects. Moldova and Georgia are already members of the WTO, while Russia aspires to membership; irrespective of how larger powers assess this issue, Russia is unlikely to receive the support of these smaller countries' for its application to the WTO, where decisions are made on the basis of consensus.

Russia's strategists seem to believe that by intimidating Georgia they will make it more cooperative, and by causing internal hardship they will weaken appeal of Georgia's pro-Western orientation. Apparently, they do not realize that such crude and hostile actions only embolden Georgia's attitudes. Moreover, Russia will gradually lose the last bastion of its influence on Georgia: the Russian market. Indeed, little wonder that Georgians increasingly question why it should remain in the Russian-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States? The Speaker of Georgia's Parliament, Nino Burjanadze, recently asked the

following rhetorical question: "If we are the only CIS country with whom Russia has visa requirements for travel, a country whose imports of wine, citrus, tea and soon maybe some other products Russia bans, then why should we remain in the CIS?"

Russia annexed the Georgian kingdom in the early nineteenth century. At that time, Russia tried the equally crude strategy of whitening Georgian frescos; erasing images of saints, Georgia's great kings and warriors for independence; and abolishing the independence of Georgian Church. All of these moves, it was hoped, would eliminate the historical memory of the Georgian people. Despite all the hardship Russian politicians imposed on Georgia for more than two centuries, Georgians remain devout, happy, hard working, artistic people. Russia's politicians appear bent on transforming amicability into open hostility.

CONCLUSIONS: The wine industry is the very symbol of Georgia. By attacking it, Russia will only make Georgia's resolve stronger. Other markets will gradually emerge to dwarf Russia's. Wines from Georgia are already taking their first successful steps in the U.S. market to high critical acclaim. The very wines that are banned in Russia are available at upscale food and beverage retailers along America's eastern seaboard. In this sense, Russia's boycott of Georgian wine is providing a necessary and overdue correction of Georgia's strategy for wine production and distribution. It is just a matter of time before this last vestige of Russian economic leverage becomes irrelevant.

With the strong vertical of power in Russia, it is hard to imagine that Russian President Vladimir Putin did not approve this decision. This means that anger and desperation in Moscow about Georgian and Moldovan independent and pro-Western policies have reached a high point. Political Freedom is a dangerous concept for the Russian political establishment. But this is unlikely to stop nations in their aspiration to be free. Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and others will continue to move towards the West, towards integration into European structures.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Mamuka Tsereteli is the Executive Director of the America-Georgia Business Council.

THE KARS-AKHALKALAKI RAILROAD: A MISSING LINK BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA

Taleh Ziyadov

The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) natural gas pipelines have transformed the strategic realities in the South Caucasus. As a result, the energy networks of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey have become more integrated, raising the significance of the East-West Transport Corridor even more. Today, these states are ready to take on a new challenge by building the Kars-Akhalkalaki interstate railroad connection that will link the rail networks of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey and lay a foundation for a potential China-Central Asia-South Caucasus-Turkey-European Union transportation corridor. This project will not only boost continental container trade between Asia and Europe via the South Caucasus, but also further integrate the South Caucasus region with Europe.

BACKGROUND: The idea of connecting the rail networks of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey was first discussed during the Joint Transport Commission meeting in July 1993. The initiative was later integrated into the Master Plan on the Trans-European Railway (TER) networks sponsored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). In July 2002, the Ministers of Transport of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey signed a protocol confirming the route and at a February 28, 2005 meeting the parties agreed to conduct a feasibility study. UNECE lists this route among Priority 1 projects that could be funded and implemented rapidly by 2010. The realization of this project depends on the construction of a 98 km-long (60 miles) segment of rail from Kars in Turkey to Akhalkalaki in Georgia (68 kilometers in Turkey, 30 kilometers in Georgia, and the rehabilitation of the Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi line). The estimated cost of the project is about \$400 million.

Today, there are two operational railroads in the South Caucasus, which are part of the EU-sponsored TRACECA initiative that links Azerbaijan's and Georgia's transportation networks. These are the Baku-Tbilisi-Poti and the Baku-Tbilisi-Batumi railways. There is, however, no rail link between Georgia and Turkey.

The construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad will connect Georgian and Turkish railroads and facilitate trade in the East-West direction. For example, a cargo from China could be delivered to Aktau (Kazakhstan) and then transported by railway ferries to Baku and shipped directly to Istanbul and onward to Europe via the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars-Istanbul rail system. Likewise, a shipment from Europe could be easily transported to the South Caucasus, Central Asia or China. Hence, Kars-Akhalkalaki serves as a rail connection that will eventually unite railway networks of China-Central Asia-South Caucasus-Turkey and the European Union.

The governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan have already made some progress in expanding the current TRACECA routes to Central Asia, which will be extended to China. In December, 2005, a container truck from Kazakhstan was sent to Georgia via Azerbaijan as a part of a pilot program. A 3,850-km (2406 miles) long Kazakh rail system from Aktau near the Caspian Sea to the city of Dostlik (Druzhba) near the Kazakh-Chinese border is currently operational. The length of the Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars and the Kars-Istanbul sections are 826 km (516 miles) and 1,933 km (1208) respectively.

IMPLICATIONS: One of the major outcomes of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad will be the increased continental trade through the East-West Transport Corridor. There are various estimates regarding the volume of potential cargo shipments through this route. Most forecasts suggest that during the initial stage (the first two years of operation), the volume of transport will reach 2 million tons and in the following three years it could increase up to 8-10 million tons.

The construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway will also open markets in the Mediterranean region and South-East Europe for Azerbaijan, Georgia and Central Asian states. It will increase the volume of container traffic through the South Caucasus and be a more secure and shorter way of reaching Asia or Europe. Goods and products from these countries could be shipped directly to Mersin, a coastal Turkish port at the Mediterranean Sea, from where they could be transported by sea to the United States, Israel, Egypt or other North African and South European states. Turkish rail networks will also create an opportunity for uninterrupted rail shipments to and from Southeastern Europe.

In addition, the project has significant geopolitical significance. As was the case with energy projects, interstate railways will bring along questions regarding common security threats and will require collaborative efforts to address these threats. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey will further integrate their security agendas to accommodate Azerbaijan's and Georgia's quest for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership. The trilateral cooperation between Ankara, Baku and Tbilisi will move the three states into a more integrated transportation and security arrangements, thus cementing their ties with Europe and the United States.

Since the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad is a component of the East-West Transport Corridor, both the United States and the European Union will benefit from the realization of this project. Occasional attempts by some U.S. and European legislators and officials, especially those under the influence of Armenian lobbying groups

that oppose the construction of this railroad, could seriously damage American and European national interests and their states' role in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey could finance the construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki project without external assistance. Yet, U.S. and European political and financial backing will strengthen their commitment to the regional development and increase their presence in the region, as it was during the construction of the BTC and BTE energy pipelines.

Armenia's self-imposed seclusion by continuously rejecting to pull its troops from occupied Azerbaijani territories will further detach it from regional developments. Azerbaijani officials have repeatedly stated that they will not consider the Armenia-backed initiative to use the century-old Kars-Gyumri (Armenia)-Tbilisi railway unless Armenia ends its occupation of Azerbaijani lands. At the same time, Baku does not want to delay strategic and economic projects and wait until Armenia and Azerbaijan come to an overdue agreement in resolving the eighteenth-year old Karabakh conflict. Thus, the construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki project, which may start in the late 2006 or the early 2007, is likely to advance regardless of developments in the Karabakh peace process.

CONCLUSIONS: The construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad will address a missing link in the transportation networks connecting Europe and Asia. It will increase the volume of continental trade via Azerbaijan and Georgia and boost these states' role as transit countries. It will also move Azerbaijan and Georgia closer to the Euro-Atlantic community and create new opportunities for American and European engagement in the region. The project will accommodate the EU-sponsored TRACECA initiative as well as the U.S.-backed East-West Transport Corridor and make the region a crossroads for Trans-European and Trans-Asian continental trade.

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FOREIGN WEAPONS, IRANIAN THREATS: THE CASPIAN BASIN IN IRAN'S GUNSIGHTS

Stephen Blank

As the tension surrounding Iran grows, the possibility of military action in and around its territory also grows commensurately. While most attention focuses on conflict scenarios in Iran, the Gulf, or the Straits of Hormuz because of their strategic significance; a fuller assessment cannot and should not neglect the Caspian dimension of this crisis. This is because Iran's present capabilities and the possible development of a nuclear weapon are ultimately fungible. Although today America and Israel are its main enemies and the likely target of Iranian scenarios, the Iranian strategic calculus, like every other government's, is not immutable for all time. Therefore these capabilities could ultimately be targeted on Central Asian, Caucasian states, Arab states in and around the Persian Gulf, Russia, or Turkey. Turkey is already revising its force structures to deal with the possible consequences of Iranian nuclearization.

BACKGROUND: Although its policies in the Caspian basin have generally been circumspect, Iran is not necessarily a status quo power in this region. It attacked Azerbaijani oil platforms in 2001 and subsequently threatened Kazakh explorations in the Caspian in disputes over who owns that sea's waters. Since then, in 2002 the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) uncovered intelligence showing that elements of Iran's clerical army, the Pasdaran, were secretly providing training

and logistic support to the al-Qaeda affiliated Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Iran is also tied to support for radical religious and separatist movements in Azerbaijan, and in 2005 the London Sunday Telegraph reported that Pasdaran had begun secretly training Chechen rebels in sophisticated terror techniques to enable them to carry out more effective attacks against Russian forces. These examples illustrate the multifarious nature of the geopolitical threats to security in this region and Iran's capability to seriously expand them. And since the ability of all states and energy producers to survive and/or produce that energy is tied to the presence or absence of such shocks, the geostrategic situation here is crucial beyond Central Asia's borders.

Iran's threats include the use of conventional or potentially nuclear weapons to threaten local governments and to provide what might be called extended deterrence for insurgent groups among them whom it already has cultivated and supported. Although Iran's conventional arsenal pales relative to those of Moscow and Washington; a nuclear capability greatly augments its deterrence capability and potentially frees it as it did Pakistan to conduct guerrilla campaigns against hostile governments in its neighborhood. In its most recent exercises conducted in the Straits of Hormuz, named 'Holy Prophet', in the first week of April 2006, Iran attempted to send Washington a message of its capability made up of what has also become habitual Iranian boasting about its new conventional capabilities. While virtually every foreign analyst dismissed the announcement of new weapons as nothing new or as being mainly for domestic and local consumption, the fact remains that even if these weapons are not as potent as Iran claims they are, possession of them enhances its capabilities in the Caspian Sea as well as in the Straits of Hormuz. In those exercises Iran claimed to have tested a new radar-invisible, stealth multiple-head ballistic missile, Fajr-3 with a range of 1200 Kilometers, the Kowsar land to sea anti-ship missile. It also claims to have tested the world's

fastest torpedo, a rocket-propelled torpedo called the Hoot (whale), from which no ship can escape, evidently based on the Russian Shkval, and a 'super-modern flying boat', possibly a derivation from a Russian wing in ground platform (WIG), as well as jets and helicopters. Although Iran claims to have made all these new missiles itself, again foreign analysts believe that they largely derive from Russian, Chinese, or North Korean models or from assistance provided through the acquisition of Western technology, not domestic ingenuity.

IMPLICATIONS: The address of the recent Iranian saber-rattling is clear: General Yahya Rahim Safavi, head of the elite Revolutionary Guards, said on April 5 that the U.S. must recognize Iran as a big regional power. Since Iran's capabilities to attack shipping and energy platforms in the Caspian, threaten neighboring governments with missiles, and defend against their air attacks are real enough, if they were buttressed by nuclear weapons Iran's ability to incite mischief in the area would grow enormously. Azerbaijan in particular is already increasingly uneasy about what might happen if the United States and Iran come to blows. In advance of President Ilham Aliyev's U.S. visit in late April, the Azerbaijani media candidly referred to perceptions of intense U.S. pressure to join an anti-Iranian alliance despite statements by Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov that Azerbaijan would not join a coalition against any particular power. Nonetheless, Azimov did indicate Baku's concern about Iranian activities in the disputed sector of the Caspian Sea. He also made clear that Iran's nuclear program as well as the Armenian nuclear power reactor evoke serious apprehensions in Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the Azerbaijani press reports charged that if Azerbaijan did ally itself with Washington and allow U.S. forces overflight and even limited basing rights there, Iran would probably hit it with multiple acts of sabotage and insurgency form within. Iran could also invade its air space and strike it with its missiles, including its oil industry. Azerbaijan's Minister of National Security, Eldar Makhmudov, also charged that Al-

Qaeda was seeking to recruit local girls to be Shakhids, (martyrs) and carry out suicide terrorist operations. It is hardly inconceivable that Iran could also recruit terrorists from within Azerbaijan for such purposes based on existing or future cells that it develops within the country.

CONCLUSIONS: Even a cursory assessment of Iran's present capabilities makes clear that it does have the means to make a great deal of trouble for many South Caucasian and Central Asian governments and even for Russia, especially in the North Caucasus. The pressure generated by Iran's nuclearization and America's determination to prevent it are also narrowing the space for maneuver available to local governments. But if Iran were to successfully become a nuclear power, their space for maneuver would narrow even further. It is quite clear that a nuclear capability, added to Iran's regionally potent and growing conventional capability, and its highly developed terrorist connections constitutes a considerable threat capability directed against all of its neighbors, and not just in the Gulf. This development also bears out the old axiom and paradox that nuclear capability and deterrence actually in some sense heighten the possibility for conventional wars at smaller scales of the spectrum of conflict.

Iran's growing capabilities and unmitigated belligerence highlights the folly of the Russian and Chinese policies of supplying it lavishly with weapons and technology. As Russian analysts are now coming to realize more than ever before, the capabilities transferred to Iran could be used to threaten Moscow's vital interests and possibly even Beijing's as well. Whatever the consequences of Iran's nuclearization or of the campaign to stop it might be in the Middle East and Persian Gulf, they will be no less important insofar as the Caspian littoral and Greater Central Asia are concerned.

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THE OSCE AND POLITICAL DISPUTES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Richard Weitz

The protracted crisis in Kyrgyzstan highlights the persistent inability of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to address political strife and conflicts within the states of the former Soviet Union. Structural, financial, and political factors will invariably continue to impede its role in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the rest of Eurasia. OSCE leaders are better advised to direct their limited resources towards averting conflicts between countries and encouraging stronger multilateral institutions to resolve ongoing political crises within member states.

BACKGROUND: In an interview published in the local Aki-press agency on February 19, 2006, the head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission in Kyrgyzstan, Markus Mueller, once more expressed concern over persistent instability in the country. He called for a dialogue between the president, prime minister, parliament, and other major Kyrgyz political actors engaged in the country's protracted and sometimes violent political struggle since the March 2005 "Tulip Revolution." Mueller said that the OSCE headquarters in Vienna also is "worried about the situation" in Kyrgyzstan.

The OSCE's efforts to promote stability in Kyrgyzstan, like its attempts to resolve the "frozen conflicts" in Moldova and the South Caucasus, underscore the institution's inability to resolve political disputes within and between Central Asian and Caucasian countries. The OSCE is perhaps Europe's most comprehensive security institution in terms of both membership and areas of responsibility. Through the institution's diverse components, its 55 member states—including Canada, the United States, and most European and Central Asian countries—address political, economic, and security issues. Among the latter are initiatives to avert mass violence, manage crises, and rehabilitate conflict regions. Like the European Union, the OSCE seeks to reduce political, economic, and social factors within societies that many believe contribute to instability, radicalism and terrorism. These causes include unfair elections, unjustified restrictions on freedom of

expression, and discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, or other improper considerations. Besides supporting free elections, civil liberties and access to information (e.g., eliminating restrictions on Internet usage), OSCE bodies also advocate liberal economic reforms.

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the OSCE has devoted greater attention to security issues in Central Asia. Its current projects in the region include reducing illicit trafficking in drugs and small arms, improving security components in travel documents, strengthening border controls, and countering terrorist financing and other terrorist activities. Another OSCE security priority in Central Asia has been improving police training, equipment, and oversight. This initiative began in August 2003 as an agreement between the OSCE and the Kyrgyz government. It soon spread to other Central Asian countries. The OSCE's Special Police Matters Unit intends for this effort to bolster recipient governments' ability to counter terrorism and other illegal activities, as well as curb corruption and other law enforcement abuses against citizens' rights and freedoms. The OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation has succeeded in encouraging members to adopt stricter export controls on small arms, light weapons, and Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS).

IMPLICATIONS: The OSCE's leverage over its members derives mainly from its prestige. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) sends observers to monitor nationwide

elections in its member states. Their assessment of a ballot's fairness has a major impact on whether the international community deems the election legitimate. For this reason, the governments of Central Asia and other former Soviet republics typically seek its endorsement. President Nursultan Nazarbaev's desire for his country to assume the OSCE chairmanship in 2009 appears to have contributed to the recent introduction of economic and political reforms in Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, at a meeting in Moscow in 1991, the OSCE members agreed that they could send a mission of independent experts "to facilitate resolution of a particular question or problem relating to the human dimension" of the OSCE. According to the provisions of the Moscow Mechanism, "Such a mission may gather the information necessary for carrying out its tasks and, as appropriate, use its good offices and mediation services to promote dialogue and co-operation among interested parties." If at least six OSCE governments request it, the OSCE can send up to three special rapporteurs to investigate an issue even without the consent of the state in question.

OSCE members invoked the Mechanism for the first and, thus far, only time in November 2002, when a failed assassination attempt against Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Niyazov triggered a wave of government repression. The Mechanism's limited utility became apparent after the Turkmenistan government declined to either appoint a partner rapporteur or permit the OSCE rapporteur to enter the country. Although the rapporteur issued a scathing denunciation of the Niyazov regime's human rights policies, the OSCE members did little to pursue the matter because the Moscow Mechanism lacks enforcement provisions against governments found violating their human dimension commitments. U.S. Senator Sam Brownback unsuccessfully proposed employing the Moscow Mechanism to investigate the May 2005 Andijan incident.

Besides preventing conflicts between or within member countries, the OSCE has long sought to resolve already existing conflicts. For instance, the institution attempted to help end the 1992-97 civil war in Tajikistan, though it finally took Russian military intervention to secure the peace agreement. Since then,

the OSCE has sought to resolve the so-called "frozen conflicts" in the former Soviet Union, including those in Georgia, Moldova, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Its progress in these cases has been minimal.

The Russian and Central Asian governments have tended to see the OSCE as excessively preoccupied with democracy and human rights rather than with enhancing members' security and economic development. On July 3, 2004, nine of the twelve leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) endorsed a statement criticizing the OSCE for interfering in the internal affairs of member states, employing a double standard that unduly focuses on abuses in CIS countries, and becoming overly preoccupied with human rights issues at the expense of managing new challenges and promoting members' security and economic well-being. The declaration also castigated the ODIHR and the OSCE field operations for overspending, making unwarranted criticisms of members' domestic political practices, and pursuing their own reform agendas.

Russian officials have led the attack against the OSCE. In December 2005, the Chief of the Russian General Staff accused the organization of becoming a surveillance agency for overseeing adherence to democratic principles in CIS states despite these governments' right to determine their own destiny. That same month, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that ODIHR had become too independent and required more specific directions to guide its work. Since 2004, Russian officials have been trying to direct the OSCE to reduce its election monitoring activities and other democracy-promotion projects. As part of this campaign, the Russian government refused to approve the OSCE budget for several months until its members agreed to hold talks on Russia's proposals.

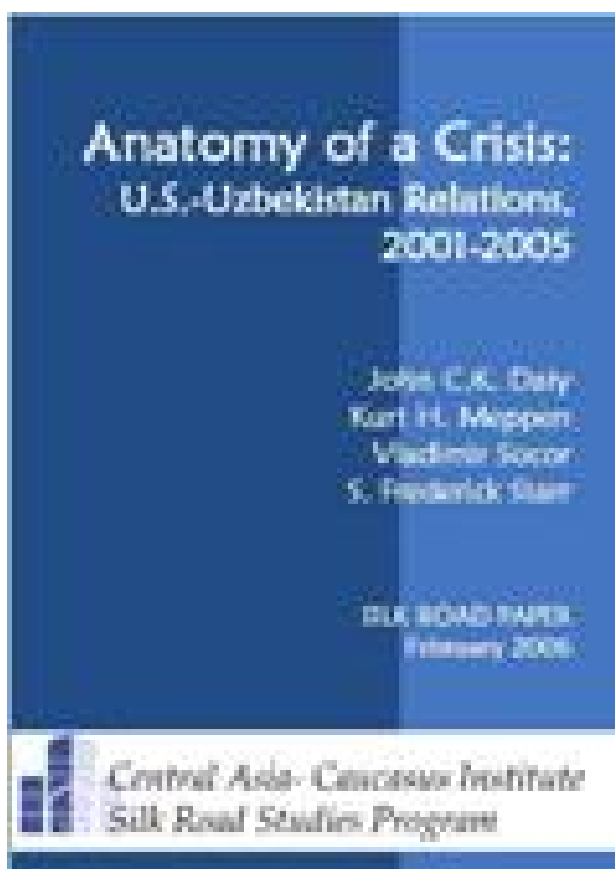
Since OSCE decisions are made by consensus, the other members have had to weigh the concerns of Russia and its allies. Although OSCE members eventually rejected most Russian demands, they did agree to reduce Moscow's share of the OSCE budget. Other resource limitations also constrain the OSCE's influence in Central Asia. The organization allocates far more funds and personnel to its field missions in southeastern Europe than to those in Central Asia. The OSCE has

established a Special Representative for Central Asia, but the incumbent lacks funds to hire a separate staff.

CONCLUSIONS: In a multilateral response to any major domestic political crisis in Central Asia, the OSCE would soon be eclipsed by unilateral action or by more powerful security institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Although these organizations have a weaker mandate to intervene in member states' internal affairs than the OSCE, their superior resources and less confrontational dialogue with Central Asian governments gives these institutions greater opportunities to encourage these leaders to resolve internal differences that could escalate into major civil strife. Should actual fighting break out, one

or more of these organizations will probably take the lead in organizing any ensuing peacekeeping force. China and especially Russia might attempt to impose peace unilaterally, but other governments likely would feel more comfortable if any military intervention occurred under the auspices of an international institution. Most importantly, a multilateral framework would make the situation more transparent and give other actors a mechanism to communicate their own interests and concerns. Unfortunately, the OSCE has proven itself largely ineffective at performing such functions.

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New Silk Road Paper!

Anatomy of a Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005

by John C. K. Daly,
Kurt H. Meppen,
Vladimir Socor
and S. Frederick Starr

Few, if any, observers anticipated the rapid downward spiral of U.S.-Uzbek relations during the past several years. This *Silk Road Paper* includes two articles and a detailed, annotated chronology, which seeks to identify the causes for the collapse of the strategic partnership, providing a clear understanding of the sequences of events that is necessary for both Washington and Tashkent to look ahead and seek to plot a rational path forward.

This 110-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

FIELD REPORTS

MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS FROM POST-SOVIET STATES IN EUROPE: COMMUNITY BUILDING ALONG RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES

Erica Marat and Emin Poljarevic

The number of Muslim immigrants in the European Union from the post-Soviet states has been rapidly increasing since the early 1990s. While most immigrants seek economic stability, better education and social security in the West European states, some came as a result of suppressive regimes in the post-Soviet states. In the course of about a decade, thousands of immigrants from Central Asian republics, South Caucasus and some parts of southern Russia requested political asylum because of political instability and government persecution in their home countries.

Upon arrival to Europe, many Muslim immigrants from the post-Soviet states use their newly won freedom of expression and association for joining religious communities. The immigrant communities return to their theological foundations that were suffocated during the Soviet rule. However, this return goes beyond the pre-Soviet practice of Islamic belief and takes more non-traditional forms in the European context. Not only do labor migrants or migrants with low income and education tend to connect along religious lines, but students and businessmen also join religious networks.

Seventy years of communist rule suppressed religious identities across the Soviet space, be that Christian, Muslim or any other religion. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, religious sentiments saw a revival in most of the post-Soviet states, including the Central Asian states, southern

Russia and the Caucasus. With that, all post-Soviet states tried to maintain a rather liberal approach towards religion compared to other Islamic countries. Especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, religious traditions were practiced only on special holidays, while Islam plays a marginal role in everyday life.

In the immigrant societies in Europe, the Central Asian and South Caucasus immigrants often choose to build social networks according to their religious identities, as opposed to political, ethnic, historical or professional grounds. Most of them build social networks with Middle Eastern, North African, Balkan and Turkish communities and not with non-Muslim or secular post-Soviet immigrant communities or the local population. An increased internationalization of Islamic communities can be observed across Europe, and post-Soviet Muslims have become an integral part of that. By joining larger diasporas on the basis of Islam, Central Asian and Caucasian immigrants are exposed to the political views perpetuated in these Muslim communities.

Unlike immigrants from the Middle Eastern and North African states, Muslim immigrants from the post-Soviet states have a common Soviet past and did not experience West European colonial domination in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a common element for most other immigrants. Despite the fact that a set of distinctive features characterize Muslim immigrants from the

post-Soviet states compared to other Muslim communities, religious identity plays a dominant role in their integration into the West European reality. Formal participation includes joining religious institutions such as mosques, religious schools and cultural-religious organizations. Informal participation includes practice of religious traditions in family events and inter-ethnic marriages.

Although no specific statistical findings exist, annually hundreds of Muslim immigrants from post-Soviet states migrate to EU states for short or long terms as labor migrants, students, and political asylum seekers. The number of political asylum seekers has been rising in Norway, Sweden, Germany and East European states. To give one example, in summer 2005, the UN High Commissioner on Refugees transported 439 Uzbek refugees to various EU states as a result of violent suppression of riots in Uzbekistan.

In light of the looming transformation of political regimes in the Central Asian states and on-going

political tensions in the Caucasus, the number of asylum seekers from former Soviet states is likely to continue to increase in the coming years. Potential and ongoing instability in places like Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan will consequently result in increased migration to the European Union.

To a certain degree, the pace of Central Asian communities' integration into European societies is similar to their Middle Eastern and North African counterparts. Immigrants that came to Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union show how religious sentiments are reinforced among even the most moderate immigrants. Muslim immigrants from the former Soviet states also show how religion is not necessarily only a survival tool in a foreign environment. Religion can substitute ethnic identities, class relations or political views.

TAJIKISTAN MULLS NEW NGO, RELIGIOUS LAWS

Zoya Pylenko

Following the recent Russian, Uzbek and Kazakh examples, Tajikistan is the next former Soviet Republic planning to create a harsher environment for non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A new law on religion, which according to its critics is promising further repression of civil society, is also in the making.

On 2 December, the Tajik government adopted a new draft law on public organizations, which is currently debated in parliament, and which will also affect the activities of NGOs. Tajik analysts believe

the proposed law is, mostly, a sign of the authorities' concern about what they believe are political activities of NGOs, who are often dependent on foreign donor funding. Such fears would have been greatly increased after last year's upheavals in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

"The problems in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which governments in the region believe were encouraged by the activities of foreign-funded NGOs, plus the Russian law's example, have

probably helped shaping the new Tajik law,” said a regional analyst. It is doubtful, however, whether similar unrest as in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will haunt Tajikistan, one of the more stable countries in Central Asia, where many people are still grateful to President Emomali Rakhmonov for “ending the civil war” nearly ten years ago.

Tajikistan is heavily dependent on foreign aid, which according to some gives Western donors enough leverage over the country to have the law amended, if they would push for it. In the meantime, some international NGOs, such as the National Democratic Institute and Internews from the U.S., have already experienced difficulties with re-registration – that was required even before the new law – which they did not yet manage to complete. Other NGOs have also been checked by the interior ministry’s organized crime department.

The new law proposal does not directly ban the activities of NGOs. But some observers think that if parliament adopts the law, several organizations will find it difficult to continue operations. “Some fear that up to 80 percent of NGOs may be closed under the new law, if narrowly interpreted,” said the analyst – adding however that this seemed unlikely because Tajikistan has no wish to be compared with Uzbekistan, where most international and many national NGOs were forced to close down in the wake of the Andijon massacre in May last year.

Control over NGOs is set to become stricter, however. Under the previous law, the finance ministry and the prosecutor’s office used to have the right to check NGOs. With the new law, the justice ministry would also get the right to check them. The tax department will control the sources and extent of financing of NGOs; under the new law, they will be reviewed every quarter and not, as earlier, every year. Organizations created before the

introduction of the new law will have time to re-register until March 1, 2007, according to the current draft. But although few doubt the law will come into force, it is unclear as yet when this will happen. Earlier, it was thought it might be enacted as soon as this month. But now, it seems to have been put off and might not be enacted before November’s presidential elections.

Apart from the new law on public organizations, a new law on religion is being prepared – with much larger restrictions than the current law. Some of the draft’s points are: to restrict the number of mosques; ban proselytism; ban the teaching of religion to children under seven years of age; ban foreigners from leading religious communities in the country (which would hit Tajikistan’s small Roman Catholic community, which only has foreign priests for its needs, hard); and compulsory registration for all religious communities. Furthermore, the law introduces state control over persons who teach religion within religious communities – although what requirements are needed for such teachers is unclear under the law’s current, first, draft – and over organizing Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca. The government’s religious affairs committee has been reported to defend the current draft, saying it would restrict nobody’s religious rights.

It is unlikely that the draft will become law before the end of the year, which would give time for serious re-writing. And, according to some Tajik human rights activists, this is necessary because the current draft is so vaguely-worded as to be easily misused; theoretically, it might even be used to ban the activities of the – officially recognized – Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, the activists claimed.

SAFAROV'S CASE MIRRORS AZERBAIJANI-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

Fariz Ismailzade

Last week the year-long court process on the case of Azerbaijani army officer Ramil Safarov, who was accused of murdering his Armenian colleague Gurgen Markarian during a NATO language course in Budapest was concluded. The Hungarian court found Safarov guilty and sentenced him to life imprisonment with the right to apply for amnesty only after 30 years.

The decision was immediately labeled in Baku as biased and unfair. Surely, there were no doubts that Safarov was the one who committed the murder (as he himself admitted) and few doubted that he would be found guilty. Yet Azerbaijanis also hoped that the judge would take into consideration such factors as Safarov's personal background as a refugee from the occupied Azerbaijani areas, the provocations from the side of Armenian officers during the language classes and his modest behavior during the course of investigation.

The news from Hungary prompted a very radical reaction in Baku. Thousands of university students left their classes and organized ad-hoc street rallies, demanding freedom and a fair trial for Safarov. Police was totally unprepared to block such a massive flow of people and could only observe the march. Students accused the Hungarian court of being biased and unfair towards the Azerbaijani officer. They claimed that a regular murder case in Hungary would result in 8-9 years in prison, and that pressures from the Armenian lobby and government forced the Hungarian judge to impose a much harsher conviction.

Safarov's case also brought reactions from Azerbaijani politicians and media. "We were not able to protect our son!" exclaimed the Azerbaijani opposition daily *Azadliq*. "Making Ramil a hero, and claiming that he embarrassed the Azerbaijani nation, are two extreme assessments," said Ali

Kerimli, the leader of the opposition Popular Front party.

Safarov's personal lawyer Adil Ismaylov gave a press conference in Baku, saying that the defense side would appeal the decision in the Courts of Appeals and would even take the case all the way to the European Court on Human Rights until "Ramil receives a judgment that his action and personality deserve." Ismaylov also noted that a series of court procedures were violated by the Hungarian judge and expressed hope that these examples would be taken into consideration by the Court of Appeals.

The majority of Azerbaijanis continue to consider Safarov's actions as justified. "Armenians have occupied our lands, raped our women, killed our children. Why does nobody focus on that? Why does the world refuse to talk about that? Ramil has killed an enemy and he did the right thing," said Tarlan Gasimov, a master's degree student at Baku State University.

Safarov's career in the military and his various achievements in foreign military trainings add respect to him in the eyes of the Azerbaijani public. Finally, Safarov is widely respected for not putting up with Armenian officer's insults and the latter's disrespect for the Azerbaijani flag and honor. "When they [Armenian participants of the training] were drunk in the evenings, they would make insults towards me and my nation. I was being patient at the beginning, but when it came to the flag, I could not take it any more," said Ramil Safarov in an interview to ANS-TV on the day of court decision.

Safarov's case serves as a perfect example of Azerbaijani-Armenian relations today. Most international organizations and local NGOs continue to note the rising frustration in Azerbaijani society over the fruitless and

deadlocked peace process. This frustration as well as the humiliation over the loss of lands is leading to the rise of a militaristic mood among the Azerbaijani public. Most ordinary citizens truly believe that the negotiations will not lead to the liberation of the occupied regions and that war is the only remaining and effective option. Thus, Safarov's anger and revenge might be the first harbinger of future Azerbaijani-Armenian tensions.

These issues are of special importance at the moment as Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev prepares to depart to Washington on April 26 to meet with his American counterpart George W.

Bush. It is widely expected by the local experts that the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be one of the main issues in the agenda of bilateral talks. American diplomat Steven Mann, in charge of the peace process, will be traveling to the region on April 20 to make final arrangements for the "recent new proposals" made to the warring sides. It will be hard for Azerbaijani President Aliyev to make further painful compromises on the conflict while tensions in the Azerbaijani society are high and Safarov's case continues to remain the number one news in the local media.

KYRGYZSTAN: CIVIL SOCIETY IN DANGER

Nurshat Ababakirov

On April 12, 2006, unknown assailants assaulted Edil Baisalov, leader of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, in what seemed an assassination attempt. The incident caused widespread concern over the political situation in the country after notorious criminal kingpin Rysbek Akmatbaev's determination to become a member of parliament in the April 9 by-election came true.

Prime Minister Felix Kulov announced that the incident had political grounds because Mr. Baisalov is a prominent critic of criminals' attempts to enter politics. Three days before the incident, the Coalition along with a number of non-governmental organizations led a march in the streets of Bishkek calling for the government to make more decisive steps to contain the burgeoning criminal world.

On April 18, doctors made clear that Mr. Baisalov was hit by a metal bar that caused him with a mild brain concussion. He was assaulted as he was leaving his office across from the Prosecutor General's Office in the center of Bishkek. By coincidence, several days before the event, Edil Baisalov requested protection from law enforcement agencies, but authorities could not provide him with individual protection because he is

not a high-ranking government official and protection was offered for a fee. Currently, the special forces guard the hospital, where Edil Baisalov is resting.

According to Bishkek prosecutor Uchkun Karimov, there are three versions regarding the assassination attempt: first, a connection to the political activities of Edil Baisalov, hooliganism with an attempt to rob, and personal hatred. Nevertheless, he added that there might be another organized criminal groups than that of Rysbek Akmatbaev, which may have wanted to use the rampant criminalized situation to target Akmatbaev's group. Surprisingly, law enforcement agencies embarked upon working on this case on the basis of article 234 of the Criminal Code, which concerns 'hooliganism'. The Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society is against it, underlining the "conditions of the assassination attempt and characteristics of the wound", which shows that it had been planned in advance to kill Edil Baisalov.

Being a person who vigorously contributed to the "Tulip Revolution" last year and who went along with revolutionaries like President Kurmanbek, Edil Baisalov also strongly criticizes the incumbent government. He does not blame criminals for conducting the

assassination attempt; rather he blames the government, which legitimized their influence by negotiating with them, thus making them blunt enough to attack prominent people in order to threaten them.

Despite the widespread belief that criminals started surfacing on the political arena, President Kurmanbek Bakiev is not excessively worried in this regard, saying that the level of criminality in Kyrgyzstan does not exceed that of other CIS countries. Nonetheless, he shares the idea that there is a vague “third party” that is willing to take advantage of current situation.

On April 13, U.S. ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Marie Yovanovitch visited Baisalov in the hospital. She said that the attack could be considered not only an attack on a person but also an attack on civil society. “It was a reminder for the government to protect civil society”, she stated.

Rysbek Akmatbaev is believed to be responsible for the assault, because he was sidelined twice from entering parliament, even though he earned 79 percent of the votes in the elections. Both of these de-registrations were initiated by the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society and carried out by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Initially, the CEC removed Rysbek Akmatbaev from the list of the candidates because his case in court had not been closed, but the Pervomayskiy Court ruled that he was eligible to run. The second time, on April 11, he was temporarily barred from assuming his position because of the ongoing judicial review of a January murder case in which Rysbek Akmatbaev acted as a defendant.

Parliamentarian Kabay Karabekov, an ardent critic of the government, connects this event to the recent call to Tuigunaly Abdraimov, the CEC chairman, by a man, who introduced himself as Rysbek Akmatbaev and threatened him.

With his notorious background, Akmatbaev’s landslide victory in the by-elections on 9 April took many officials as well as Russian and the U.S. leadership by surprise. Before the by-elections, “Moscow assumed that the government would not allow such an outcome [Akmatbaev’s election victory]”, said Arkady Dubnov, a political analyst. Yovanovitch also showed her concern over the situation. “Journalists are scared and parliamentarians openly admit they are intimidated. Even police officers are intimidated”, said the U.S. ambassador.

The good side of the last incident might be that it strengthened and unified the opposition, including prominent parliamentarians, NGOs, and political activists, which at an April 18 press conference announced that they set an ultimatum, “constitutional reforms or dismissal of the [Bakiyev-Kulov] tandem”. The next march, which anticipates a crowd of 20,000 protestors and a bigger number of civic organizations and political parties, is being planned for April 29 throughout the country. It is scheduled to last 3-4 days until the government shows its intention to carry out demands of the opposition over such issues as constitutional reform, cadre politics, and criminality.



Central Asia- Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program

NEWS DIGEST

GEORGIA SEEKS WAYS TO COMPENSATE FOR RUSSIAN WINE BAN

5 April

Meeting on April 5 with farmers in Kakheti, one of Georgia's key wine-producing regions, President Mikheil Saakashvili asked them not to abandon viticulture in response to the recently announced ban in imports of Georgian wine to Russia, which hitherto accounted for 80-90 percent of all Georgian wine exports. Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli announced a three-month tax break for wine producers, and said Georgia will explore alternative markets for its wine, mentioning specifically Kazakhstan and China. Noghaideli also summoned Russian Ambassador Vladimir Chkhikvishvili in an attempt to clarify Moscow's rationale for the ban. (Caucasus Press)

AZERBAIJAN 'WILL NOT JOIN ANTI-IRAN COALITION'

6 April

Azerbaijan wants to maintain "good neighborly" relations with all regional states, and for that reason will not join any coalition against Iran, Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov told journalists in Baku on April 6. Azimov said his recent talks in Washington touched on Iran's insistence on its right to conduct uranium enrichment and the hypothetical threat to the region from Iranian nuclear weapons. But, Azimov added, the United States "does not want anything from Azerbaijan" in that context. Azimov reaffirmed Baku's position that all countries have the right to use nuclear energy for exclusively peaceful purposes. Also on April 6, presidential-administration official Novruz Mammedov told journalists that the agenda for President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Washington in late April is being finalized. It will be Aliyev's first official visit to the United States since he came to power in October 2003 in an election that Washington criticized as falling short of international standards for a free and democratic ballot. (day.az)

RIGHTS GROUP BLASTS GERMAN REFUSAL TO PROSECUTE UZBEK EX-MINISTER

7 April

Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a statement on the organization's website (<http://www.hrw.org>) on April 6 stating its intention to challenge the German federal prosecutor's decision not to open a case against former Uzbek Interior Minister Zokir Almatov. HRW was earlier involved in a complaint against Almatov by Uzbek citizens in December 2005 seeking to try

Almatov under German law for alleged mass killings in Andijon. Almatov had been undergoing medical treatment in Germany but has since returned to Uzbekistan. HRW noted in its April 6 statement that German Federal Prosecutor Key Nehm decided on March 31 to forego action against Almatov because he considered the chances of a successful investigation and prosecution "nonexistent." HRW said that the decision "is a blow for victims in Uzbekistan and damages Germany's reputation as a principled leader on behalf of international justice." Holly Cartner, HRW's Europe and Central Asia director, said, "The prosecutor should have begun a criminal investigation into Almatov's alleged crimes as soon as he arrived in Germany and prevented him from leaving." (RFE/RL)

CANADIAN CITIZEN FACES EXTRADITION TO CHINA FROM UZBEKISTAN

7 March

Huseyin Celil, a naturalized Canadian citizen who has been arrested in Uzbekistan, faces extradition to China, where he could face the death penalty, the "Toronto Star" and the "Globe and Mail" reported on April 6. A Chinese court sentenced Celil, described by his family as a Chinese-born Uyghur rights activist, to death in absentia for his political activities, the "Globe and Mail" reported. Celil, who gained Canadian citizenship several months ago, traveled to Tashkent to meet with his family. Uzbek authorities arrested him on a Chinese warrant on March 26. Celil's wife, Kamila Celil, told the "Toronto Star," "He can't go to China, because they will arrest [him] and they will kill him." Celil said that she does not believe Uzbek assurances that her husband will not be extradited. Canadian officials said that they have offered the family assistance but noted that Canadian privacy laws prevent them from providing details. Canada does not maintain an embassy in Uzbekistan; the country's embassy in Moscow is dealing with the matter. (RFE/RL)

DETAILS OF RUSSIAN-ARMENIAN GAS AGREEMENT REMAIN UNCLEAR

7 April

In an April 6 statement, Russia's state-owned Gazprom announced that under an agreement finalized with Armenia, it will gain control of the export pipeline currently under construction to provide Armenia with gas from Iran, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Gazprom said it will take possession of the first, 40 kilometer section of that pipeline this autumn, and that

the ArmRosGazprom joint venture will be awarded the right to build the second, 197-kilometer section. But a senior Armenian government official told RFE/RL on April 5 that the deal with Gazprom, under which that company is to receive the fifth unit of the Hrazdan thermal power plant, does not entail yielding control of the export pipeline from Iran. Armenian Energy Minister Armen Movsisian similarly told journalists on April 6 that the pipeline "has not yet been built, there are no shares in it, and it therefore cannot be sold." And on April 7, Gazprom amended the statement on its website to remove any reference to its acquisition of the pipeline from Iran, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. A separate Armenian government statement on April 6 said Gazprom will pay a total of \$248.8 million for the Hrazdan facility, of which almost \$189 million will be paid in natural gas to be supplied between now and the end of 2008. According to Movsisian, that agreement will translate into a price increase for Armenian households of only 10 percent. Opposition parliament deputy Stepan Zakarian (Artarutiun) criticized on April 6 as "a serious mistake" the reported ceding of the Iran pipeline to Gazprom, while parliament deputy speaker Tigran Torosian called on Prime Minister Andranik Markarian to provide a formal explanation for the government's U-turn on yielding further assets to Russia. (RFE/RL)

GUNMEN KILL AFGHAN HEALTH WORKERS

10 April

Unidentified gunmen have killed five health workers in an attack in north-west Afghanistan, officials say. A doctor and several nurses were among those killed in the attack on a clinic in Badghis province late on Sunday, governor Enayatullah Enayat said. Meanwhile in southern Helmand province, three people, including two policemen, have been killed in separate incidents. Violence has risen sharply in recent months, with a string of suicide attacks, mostly in Afghanistan's south. It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack on the health centre in a remote part of Badghis province. "This clinic was essential for this area. It was the only health care there," Mr Enayat told the Associated Press news agency. He said the assailants had set fire to health centre. The two policemen killed in Nawa district of Helmand province died in an explosion while on a poppy eradication patrol, provincial police chief Gen Abdul Rahman Saber said. In other violence in the province, Taliban militants attacked two trucks taking food and water supplies to the American base in Greshk district. One of the drivers was killed while the other is reported missing, Amanullah, a senior provincial police officer, told the BBC. (BBC)

CHINA TO FUND TAJIK HIGHWAY

10 April

Tajikistan has negotiated an agreement with China under which Beijing will provide a loan of \$269 million for road construction in Tajikistan, a source in the Tajik Transportation and Roads Ministry said. The loan, with an interest rate of 2 percent, will go toward rebuilding a highway linking Dushanbe and the Uzbek border, including a tunnel under the Shahrison mountain pass. (Avesta)

TWO MILITANTS KILLED IN SHOOT-OUT IN INGUSHETIA

11 April

Police in Ingushetia surrounded a house in Nazran on April 11 where a group of militants was reportedly hiding and killed two of them in a one-hour shoot-out in which one police officer also died, ingushetiya.ru reported. A third militant was apprehended. The two dead fighters were identified as brothers, Umar and Magomed Borchashvili, from a village in Ingushetia's Sunzha Raion. Their surname suggests they were of Georgian origin; they were said to be members of the militant group headed by Saudi-born field-commander Abu-Dzeit. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN OFFICIALS STRESS BENEFITS OF GAS DEAL WITH RUSSIA

11 April

Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markarian denied on April 10 that the sale to Russia's Gazprom of the fifth unit of the Hrazdan thermal power plant will compromise Armenia's energy security, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The opposition Armenian Pan-National Movement released a statement alleging that the sale does endanger national security and was undertaken to preclude mass protests over rising gas prices in the run-up to the parliamentary election due in 2007. Markarian also denied any link between that sale and the planned increase in the price of natural gas Armenia buys from Russia. He said the new gas price (\$110 per 1,000 cubic meters compared with the previous \$56) will remain unchanged. President Robert Kocharian for his part said on April 8 during a visit to Kotayk that the sale of the Hrazdan facility will positively affect the Armenian economy insofar as it will be paid for in gas deliveries, according to Arminfo as reposted by Groong. Gazprom will reportedly pay \$250 million for the Hrazdan facility -- \$60 million in cash and the remainder in gas deliveries between now and the end of 2008 that will enable the government to peg gas prices to consumers at the current level. Also on April 10, the opposition Artarutiun bloc demanded that parliament create an ad hoc commission to investigate the terms of the deal with Gazprom, RFE/RL's

Armenian Service reported. Parliament speaker Artur Baghdasarian rejected that demand as unnecessary. (RFE/RL)

UN OFFICIAL CALLS FOR STRENGTHENING LAW AND ORDER IN CHECHNYA

11 April

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres briefed journalists in Moscow on April 11 on his visit to Chechnya and Ingushetia. Noting with approval the pace of reconstruction in Chechnya and ongoing efforts to restore law and order, he said he hopes the security situation will improve to the point that the UN agency will be able to open an office in Chechnya. Guterres said that of the \$88 million his agency provides annually for relief in the North Caucasus, 80 percent goes to Chechnya, but he added that those funds are no substitute for a large-scale Russian government development program for the region. (Interfax)

AFGHANS SELLING US ARMY 'FILES'

12 April

US forces in Afghanistan are checking reports that stolen computer hardware containing military secrets is being sold at a market beside a big US base. Shopkeepers at a market next to Bagram base, outside Kabul, have been selling memory drives stolen from the facility, the Los Angeles Times newspaper says. The disks reportedly contain personal details about US soldiers, military defences and lists of enemy targets. A US spokesman said an investigation had been ordered into the reports. Lt Mike Cody said the military was looking into "allegations that sensitive military items are being sold in local bazaars". "Coalition officials regularly survey bazaars across Afghanistan for the presence of contraband materials, but thus far have not uncovered sensitive or classified items," he said. The Los Angeles Times report said disks on sale at the market outside Bagram contained the names of allegedly corrupt Afghan officials, reports on enemy targets and details about US defences. A separate report by the Associated Press news agency appeared to confirm sensitive information could be acquired from the market. The agency said its reporter bought several disks from the Bagram market, some of which contained confidential information about US soldiers. One file reportedly described the type of training a group of soldiers had received. Another file is said to have contained a manual for flying the US military's Chinook helicopter. According to the reports, the computer drives were on sale alongside other items, apparently also from the Bagram base. These included US military uniforms and equipment such as compasses and binoculars. A shopkeeper interviewed by the Associated Press news agency said he was not interested

in the worth of the information on the memory drives. He reportedly said he was selling the items for their value as hardware alone. "They were all stolen from offices inside the base by the Afghans working there," he told the agency. "I get them all the time." Hundreds of Afghans are said to be working as cleaners, labourers and auxiliary staff at the Bagram base. (BBC)

AZERBAIJAN WANTS OSCE MINSK GROUP TO PRESSURE ARMENIA

12 April

In an April 11 interview with Trend news agency, Azerbaijani presidential-administration official Ali Gasanov argued that unless the OSCE Minsk Group is prepared to exert pressure on Armenia to agree to a settlement of the Karabakh conflict on terms acceptable to Baku, there is no point in it continuing its efforts to mediate a settlement. Also on April 11, Minsk Group French co-Chairman Bernard Fassier advised Azerbaijan to stop looking backward to the past and focus instead on reenergizing the flagging peace process. Fassier expressed concern at the upsurge in cease-fire violations since the inconclusive meeting outside Paris in February between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, and at the use by both sides of belligerent rhetoric. He advised Azerbaijani journalists to refrain from using the terms "aggressor" and "victim" to denote Armenia and Azerbaijan, respectively. Fassier also divulged that following a visit to Baku and Yerevan next week by the U.S. and Russian Minsk Group co-chairs, the three co-chairs will meet in early May in Moscow, where they hope to finalize the "fundamental principles of a basic agreement" on resolving the conflict. (RFE/RL)

KADYROV OPENS GROZNY PIPE PLANT

13 April

A Grozny metal polymeric pipe plant was opened by Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov on Thursday. Pipes will be supplied to local farmers, housing and public utility services and industry, a source in the Chechen governmental press service told Interfax. The second and third segments of the plant will be opened later this year and will make pipes for water and corrosive substances. The plant will offer up to 500 jobs. (Interfax)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT SETS PRIORITIES FOR REGIONAL HEADS

14 April

President Nursultan Nazarbaev told a meeting with provincial governors and the mayors of Almaty and Astana on April 14 that the task of making Kazakhstan one of the world's 50 most competitive countries should become a "national idea" In his address, Nazarbaev

singled out the following issues: the efficiency of local executive government, regional socioeconomic problems, the introduction of electronic government, encouraging a healthy lifestyle, youth unemployment, competition and the development of small and mid-size businesses, and provincial strategic-development plans. (Kazinform)

IRAN HAS NO CHANCE OF PRODUCING NUKES ON ITS OWN - RUSSIAN CHIEF OF STAFF

15 April

Iran has no opportunity to develop its own nuclear weapons, said Russian Chief of General Staff Gen. Yury Baluyevsky. "I can tell you with all confidence that what Iran is doing now will not enable it to develop nuclear weapons either in the near or in the distant future," Baluyevsky told journalists in Moscow on Saturday. Asked whether Iran's uranium enrichment efforts pose a danger to Russia's southern territories, Baluyevsky replied, "I don't see such a threat. In my view, all Iran is doing in this area is aimed at preventing the use of force against itself." (Interfax)

KARABAKH NOT A DRUG TRANSIT ROUTE - STEPANAKERT

15 April

Stepanakert has criticized the naming of the self-proclaimed republic of Nagorno-Karabakh as a territory used for illegal drug transit in a U.S. Department of State report. Nagorno-Karabakh Foreign Minister Georgy Petrosian and police chief Armen Isagulov sent a letter to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Anne Patterson, in which they declared that "Nagorno-Karabakh is not a transit route for illegal drugs." The Department of State's International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) for 2006 "again identifies Nagorno-Karabakh and territories it controls as a drug transit route, unlike in the previous years, when explanations given by the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities helped reach understanding on this issue," the Nagorno-Karabakh Foreign Ministry told Interfax. "We would like to once again assure you with all die responsibility that Nagorno-Karabakh is not a drug transit route, not only due to the absence of a developed transportation and communication system resulting from Azerbaijan's continuing blockade of the republic, but primarily thanks to efficient preemptive efforts by Nagorno-Karabakh law enforcement agencies," Petrosian and Isagulov said in the letter. "This incorrect information was given by Azerbaijan, which has made the falsification and discrediting of Armenia an element of

its policy," they said. The authors regretted that "the report cites unconfirmed information, while repeated calls by the Karabakh authorities on putting together an independent monitoring team and sending it to Nagorno-Karabakh with a fact-finding mission have not yet evoked a response from the relevant international institutions." Nagorno-Karabakh would welcome such a monitoring team capable of drawing an independent and objective conclusion, they said. (Interfax)

BIRD FLU QUARANTINE LIFTED IN AZERBAIJAN

15 April

The Azeri bird flu prevention commission has announced that the situation surrounding the bird flu threat in the country has stabilized. The final quarantine has been lifted at the village of Banovshalar in the Agdam district, the commission said in a statement. The commission once again urged people to refrain from contact with wild birds, to keep poultry isolated and to strictly observe sanitary and hygienic standards. In addition, the commission reaffirmed that the poultry produced by Azeri poultry factories is safe. It was earlier reported that five people died of bird flu in Azerbaijan. (Interfax)

GEORGIA SEEKS NORMAL RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA - SAAKASHVILI

17 April

Georgia wants to bring its relations with Russia back to normal, President Mikheil Saakashvili said at a Monday meeting with members of the parliamentary majority. Russia's latest decisions to ban the sale of Georgian agricultural products on the Russian market "were certainly political," he said. "We will do everything we can to help Georgia become stronger, both politically and economically, and continue to move forward," Saakashvili said. The Federal Consumer Rights Oversight Service banned the import of Georgian and Moldovan wines to Russia in late March. (Interfax)

CIVILIANS IN AFGHANISTAN INJURED 'BY US FORCES'

17 April

Six people, including a mother and her newborn baby, have been injured in two incidents in eastern Afghanistan, reportedly by American forces. Both the incidents took place in Khost province. A six-year-old boy was also injured in one of the incidents. The reports come as President Hamid Karzai has ordered a probe into the killing of seven civilians by coalition forces over the weekend. The US military has also launched an investigation into the deaths. The mother was travelling home from a clinic with her newborn baby after

midnight in the Yaqubi district of Khost in the east of Afghanistan when they were fired upon by US forces, a family member told the BBC. The mother, the baby and two other women in the car were injured. One of the women had gunshot wounds in her mouth, doctors said. Wakil Ahmed, a family member, told the BBC: "We were on our way back home from the clinic. The American patrol was driving and as they stopped, we stopped. They started driving, we did the same. "As we got close to our house they stopped, and we started driving towards our house. They opened fire on us. Minutes later a translator came to us and asked who we were." Then in Khost city a few hours later, another car was shot at by a US patrol - a young man and a six-year-old boy were wounded. The provincial police chief said he was investigating both reports. On Monday President Karzai's spokesman said he was "very unhappy" about the deaths of seven civilians over the weekend and warned all those involved in military operations to take more care not to injure civilians. The civilians were reportedly killed in "friendly fire" incidents during fighting against militants. (BBC)

MOSCOW INSISTS IRAN PROBLEM SHOULD BE RESOLVED DIPLOMATICALLY

18 April

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has once again insisted that the Iran nuclear problem should be resolved diplomatically. Meeting with a UN deputy secretary general for political affairs in Moscow on Tuesday, Lavrov "placed special emphasis on the need to resolve this problem diplomatically. It was also pointed out that the principal efforts to clarify the remaining problems should be made by the IAEA, and Iran needs to actively cooperate with the agency," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Tuesday. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJAN JOINS CASPIAN SEA CONVENTION

18 April

A framework convention on the protection of the Caspian Sea came into force in Azerbaijan on Tuesday, the country's presidential press service told Interfax. The Convention was ratified by the Azerbaijani Parliament and signed by President Ilham Aliyev on April 4, 2006. The Convention was signed in Teheran on November 4, 2003. It is aimed at joint protection of the Caspian Sea environment, including defense, recovery and prolonged effective usage of the sea's biological resources by all Caspian Sea countries. The Convention was prepared on the basis of U.N.-initiated talks amongst Caspian Sea countries in 1995-2003. (Interfax)

NO ROOM FOR ISLAMIST REVOLUTION IN AZERBAIJAN - OFFICIAL

18 April

The Azerbaijani authorities keep all illegal radical religious groups under control and rule out the possibility that they could make an Islamic revolution in the country, State Committee for Religious Organizations' Affairs Chairman Rafiq Aliyev said at a meeting with a U.S. diplomatic worker in Baku on Tuesday. "Despite the presence of various radical extremist groups in Azerbaijan, the state keeps them under control," Aliyev said. Aliyev said there is no room for any revolution in Azerbaijan, including an Islamist one, the committee said in a press release. The U.S. diplomat expressed concerns about an increased number of reports dealing with the formation of radical religious groups and the possibility of an Islamic revolution in a number of local media. (Interfax)

BP SAYS BAKU-CEYHAN PIPELINE COST RISES 30 PCT

19 April

The cost of the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline has risen to \$3.9 billion, 30 percent above the original estimate of \$2.95 billion, the head of BP Plc in Azerbaijan said on Wednesday. David Woodward, head of BP Azerbaijan, told reporters that the costs of contractors and building materials had forced up the cost of the pipeline, which BP is leading. (Reuters)

GLOBAL TAX LEADERSHIP AWARD PRESENTED TO KAZAKHSTAN

19 April

The Washington-based International Tax and Investment Center (ITIC) presented its first Global Tax Leadership Award to Kazakhstan on April 10. "Kazakhstan's bold step in being the first CIS country to establish a unified tax code demonstrated unparalleled global tax leadership in 1995 and was followed by states throughout the CIS and eastern and central Europe," said Professor Charles E. McLure, Jr., ITIC Economic Advisor and head of the Award selection committee. This award is periodically presented to an individual or a country that have made significant achievements in advancing pro-investment tax reform. The first two ITIC Global Tax Leadership Awards were presented on April 10 at the Second CIS Intergovernmental Fiscal Conference in Dubai. The first Awards were presented to the Government of Kazakhstan and Sergey Shatalov, Russian Deputy Minister of Finance. The award for Kazakhstan was accepted by Deputy Chairman of the Tax Committee of the Ministry of Finance Ussenova. (ANI)