The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Issue 13

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/11824

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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Putin's sleight of mouth rhetoric

The harsh rhetoric emanating from Russia, and from Putin, on his G-8 trip in particular, certainly has succeeded in focusing attention on Russia's grievances with the West, specifically the US. Putin criticizes the international momentum towards granting sovereignty to Kosovo, the planned deployment of a missile defense system in Europe, and, in more general terms, with the US demeanor in its conduct of international relations.

While there clearly are issues on which G-8 members disagree and on which some deserve criticism, the point of Putin's remarks seems less targeted at changing policy than in asserting Russia's position as the mouthpiece of disaffection with the US and the West – an alternate pole in the "multipolar" world so often touted by Russian foreign policy elder, Yevgeni Primakov.

The tone of the rhetoric bandied about by Putin both prior to and at the outset of the G-8 meeting carries the echo of Cold War terminology and confrontation, an oddly anachronistic sound in a very different post-Soviet world. At a recent press conference with journalists from G-8 member states, when asked directly about his rhetoric and the possibility of another arms race (a race, as Putin acknowledges during his remarks, which Russia would start hamstrung by the economic and military deterioration of the past decades), Putin rejected the idea of a resumption of the Cold War:
"If we express our opinions openly, honestly and forthrightly, then this does not imply that we are looking for confrontation." (1)

However, a follow-up question on the proposed missile defense system (and later questions by other journalists) prompted a reply that reflects a bygone age of confrontation:

"[W]e have removed all of our heavy weapons from the European part of Russia and put them behind the Urals. We have reduced our Armed Forces by 300,00. … But what have we seen in response? Eastern Europe is receiving new weapons, two new military bases are being set up in Romania and Bulgaria, and there are two new missile launch areas – a radar in Czech Republic and missile systems in Poland. And we are asking ourselves the question: what is going on? Russia is disarming unilaterally. … [I]f this missile system is put in place, it will work automatically with the entire nuclear capability of the United States. … [F]or the first time in history—and I want to emphasize this—there are elements of the US nuclear capability on the European continent." … And if they put a missile defence system in Europe—and we are warning this today—there will be retaliatory measures." (2)

When pressed by a journalist from Correrre Della Serra on the impact on Europe if the missile shield were deployed, Putin added:

"And it is clear that if part of the United States' nuclear capability is situated in Europe, and that our military experts consider that they represent a potential threat then we will have to take retaliatory steps. What steps? Of course, we must have new targets in Europe." (3)

When questioned further on Russia's relations with the West, Putin focused on the planned missile defense system, which has been proposed to counter potential Iranian missiles; he starkly framed Russia's position on this issue:
"There is no justification whatsoever for installing a missile defence system in Europe." … "Iran has no missiles with a range of 5,000 to 8,000 kilometres. In other words, we are being told that this missile defense system is there to defend against something that does not exist." (4)

While there were attempts to follow-up with President Putin on the issue of Iran, Putin managed to sidestep the issue and avoid delving into the question of international sanctions against Iran over its nuclear program, except to say:

"[W]e were able to settle the North Korean issue without making any particular threats and without the use of force [obviously, these remarks were made prior to news of North Korean missile launches—SJC], and the dialogue continues. Why should we not be able to find a solution to the Iranian problem? … [W]e are working together with all the members of the UN Security Council to look for mutually acceptable solutions." (5)

Later in his remarks however, when addressing the issue of the status of arms control agreements, namely the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), Putin acknowledged, perhaps unintentionally, the possibility of an Iranian missile threat:

"The issue at hand is that only the US and Russia are prevented from developing intermediate-range missiles and, meanwhile, a lot of other countries are doing so. I already talked about this. They include Israel, Pakistan, Iran and North Korea." (Emphasis added.) (6)

As the G-8 meeting progressed, and after private talks with President Bush, President Putin made news by unveiling a plan for the US to consider deploying a defensive missile system based at a radar site in…Azerbaijan. (7) While Putin's plan has the benefit of making clear the intended "target" of the defensive
missile system by its proximity to Iran (a cosmetic issue, yet one repeatedly raised in Russian criticism of the system), Putin’s proposed site raises a number of questions. The first obviously involves offering a site on another state’s territory for US use; while Russia currently rents the Soviet-era radar installation in Azerbaijan that Putin has proposed for a "compromise" site, it would seem likely that the Azerbaijani government would have a voice in any decision of this consequence. (However, it is not surprising that Putin appears confident in offering the use of this territory.) The logistics of Russian-US cooperation on a missile system at this site certainly would require careful consideration.

Another issue raised by Putin's proposal has more to do with Russia's calculation of threats to its interest. In his remarks to the G-8 journalists, Putin made it clear that a defensive missile system on its doorstep was a threat, but is it only a threat when based in the West not the South? This elicits a more complicated question of why Russia involved itself in the creation of a nuclear program for Iran in the first place. Creating a nuclear program for a state on its borders would not appear to represent a cursory, let alone thoughtful, calculus of Russian state interests, and yet Russia has not only assisted Iran throughout the development of its nuclear program, it also recently completed an anti-aircraft missile deal with Iran. (Please see The ISCIP Analyst, Armed Forces section, Volume XIII, Number 8, 22 Feb 07 for more information.)

Putin's comments on the announcement of his proposal offer an alternative interpretation of this earlier remarks: "This [the US acceptance of the Russian-proposed alternative site] will make it possible for us not to change our stance on the targeting of our missiles." (8)

Is it possible that Putin made the earlier threat to target European sites with Russian missiles (a threat allegedly imposed on Russia by US actions) only to emerge with a plan to rescue Europe from such a threat? Does this rhetorical
game, played out across Europe, offer some insight into Russia's approach to a "mutipolar" world?

Very cynical, and perhaps very Putinesque, thoughts indeed.

Source Notes:

(1) "Interview with journalists from G8 member countries," President Vladimir Putin, 4 Jun 07 via www.kremlin.ru (President of Russia Official Web Portal).
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Creela Henderson

Russia’s youth movements harnessed to Putin’s line

Outside of the European Commission office in Moscow a young man sits in a pasteboard cage. Every fifteen minutes, a bell is rung by his fellow protesters to mark off the time that Mark Siryk, an ethnic Russian teen, has spent in Estonian jail. The demonstration that took place May 4 was organized by the pro-Kremlin youth movement, "Nashi," to draw attention to the plight of Siryk, a Nashi
commissar who was arrested in Tallinn on his way to school and accused of inciting inter-ethnic strife during riots that erupted in Estonia late in April. (1) Estonian authorities claim that the young man was responsible for initiating a violent uprising among ethnic Russians outraged over the removal of the Bronze Soldier statue from downtown Tallinn. Siryk has become something of a hero to Russian nationalists who have staged public readings of the young man’s poetry and brought the story of his arrest into Russian classrooms as a topical civics lesson. On Friday, May 4, about 2,000 teens were excused from regular classes to take part in the rally known as the School Pupil’s March, a demonstration that signals the growing power and relevance of youth movements on the Russian political scene in the lead-up to parliamentary and presidential elections. (2)

Civic apathy among Russia’s youth was taken for granted in the post-Soviet era when teens were choosing Pepsi over politics. The face of Yeltsin never appeared on T-shirts and street demonstrations were made up mainly of pensioners, who marched under red banners demanding the return of Socialist safety nets. Then came the revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the tumult of which brought the young generation’s potential as a political force to the attention of Russian politicians. “The crucial role that young people played in those revolutions made us realize that something should be done,” explained Sergei Markov, the Kremlin ideologue responsible for founding Nashi back in 2004. “We launched Nashi in towns close to Moscow so that activists could arrive overnight on Red Square, if needed. The idea was to create an ideology based on a total devotion to the president and his course.” (3) Adulation of President Putin is the single discernable platform unifying Russian youth movements such as Nashi, Mestnye, New People, Walking Together and the Young Guard, a fact suggesting that their social actions are a radicalized expression of policies handed down from the Kremlin. If that is the case, then the increasingly strident and nationalist timbre of the youth organizations’ campaigns reflects a growing sense of urgency on the part of the Putin administration to brace the country for the upcoming transfer of executive power to president’s hand-picked successor.
The School Pupil’s March on May 4 was a relatively tame demonstration by Nashi, in marked contrast to the riots that disrupted a press conference held by Estonian ambassador Marina Kaljurand at the newspaper offices of Argumenty i Fakty, two days earlier. There, Nashi activists chanting “No to fascism!” menaced Kaljurand with bodily harm until the ambassador’s bodyguards repelled them with mace. (4) Outside the newspaper office, demonstrators from the Mestnye youth organization tried to block Kaljurand’s entrance to the building and snapped the flag of Estonia off the hood of her car. None of these acts of aggression have earned the censure of the Russian government. On the contrary, the campaigns of the nationalist youth movements, when not condoned outright by the president’s United Russia party, still receive funding and strategic advice directly from the Russian government. (5) There are signs, however, that the government is trying to rein in the youth movements and harness their activities more securely to the United Russia party line.

At United Russia headquarters in Moscow on May 30, Vyacheslav Volodin, secretary of the presidium of the party’s general council and deputy speaker of the State Duma, gathered the leaders of Nashi, Young Guard, Mestnye and New People together to forge a pre-election alliance among youth organizations. (6) The pro-Kremlin youth movements already have cooperated in a number of campaigns, including a counter-rally to shout down demonstrators from opposition party Other Russia, who joined Garry Kasparov in the quickly quashed marches held in Moscow and St. Petersburg in April. More troubling is the youth groups’ recent spam campaign that brought the digitally-based channels of Estonian government and commerce to a halt. Meanwhile, at the State Duma, the United Russia party has drafted a youth policy bill designed to “raise youth in a patriotic environment” and “prevent the spread of extremism among young people.” (7) Given the virtual war tactics used by the youth organizations against the Kremlin’s enemies, the government’s rhetoric about containing extremism rings hollow as it moves to reward such behavior with increased funding flowing
from regional coffers and a promise to allocate 25 percent of the slots on its
election rolls to young (under 28 years of age) Russian citizens, who have
demonstrated loyalty to the party.

United Russia responded to criticism that it is attempting to monopolize the
country’s youth movements to serve its own ends by pointing out that it is the
only party that is making a real effort to bring young people to power. The
Kremlin’s motives for cultivating support among Russian youth are easy to
guess: in the lead-up to elections youth organizations provide rank-and-file foot
soldiers capable of bringing young voters to the polls, as is the practice in civil
societies of democratic countries. In Russia’s case, however, the youth
organizations serve the government in an unofficial capacity as radicalized bands
of thugs, capable of carrying out politically unsavory campaigns of intimidation
and violence against enemies of the Kremlin. The appearance of radical youth
groups cannot but cause alarm in any government. The young nationalist
organizations that are largely the creatures of the Kremlin’s own making are no
exception, which is why United Russia is taking a sudden keen interest in
harnessing the political force of the country’s youth organizations.

Source Notes:

(1) “Moscow calm broken by children's march, beating report,” Deutsche Presse-
Agentur, 4 May 07 via (http://news.monstersandcritics.com).
(2) “Russian TV says pro-Kremlin youth organization campaigned in schools,”
Ren-TV via BBC Worldwide Monitoring, 9 May 07 via Lexis-Nexis Academic
Universe.
(http://www.msnbc.msn.com).
(4) “Youngsters are blocking news conference of Estonian ambassador,”
Regnum News, 2 May 07 via (www.regnum.ru).
Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

FSB continues its PR campaign

Six weeks ago, the FSB announced that it had declassified some two million files during the last fifteen years. Most of the documents released related to the Stalinist purges of the 1930’s. Apparently, some 775,000 people were “rehabilitated” as a result of the FSB’s actions. (1) Although the declassifications were certainly to be welcomed, they had to be viewed also as part of a campaign designed to improve the FSB’s public image. In recent weeks, it has become clear that the “operation” to give the agency a “human face” has gone into overdrive.

On 12 May, the FSB’s Public Relations Center announced that the agency had created a “Public Council,” to be geared toward “developing cooperation between security agencies and academic organizations and Russian citizens in providing national security, protecting the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens as well as the constitutional order.” (2) The Council’s Membership consists of a number of prominent individuals, including Vyacheslav Glazychev (Chairman of the Public Chamber Commission on Regional and Local Government), Anatoli Kucherena (Chairman of the Public Chamber Commission on Control over Law Enforcement Structures), and Anatoli Torkunov, Vice-Chancellor of the Russian
Foreign Ministry’s Moscow State University of International Relations. (3) Many members of the Public Council apparently were informed of their inclusion after the fact. At least one of the Council’s new members (Glazychev) is a critic of the FSB and is determined to address the agency’s “nearly subversive activities,” as well as the subject of its corruption and business interests. (4)

FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev has welcomed the Council’s creation, claiming that “open dialogue with the public is important for all of us,” since Russian citizens should be reassured that “the principle of lawfulness, observance of rights, and people’s freedoms are among the basic principles underlying the activity of the special services.” (5)

In spite of appearances—and the inclusion of an apparent “lone critic” in the form of Glazychev, in reality the Public Council has no power. It is intended to be a purely consultative body, whose resolutions are to be advisory and non-binding. (6) Effectively, the FSB can cherry-pick which decisions to follow, and which to ignore. As such, the Council’s creation should be viewed not as evidence that “development of civil society in Russia is getting into high gear,” (7) but as a mere sop to the idea of true democratic accountability.

**In brief: FSB to absorb yet another agency?**

Over the last few years, the FSB has subsumed under its command—or absorbed fully—several other law-enforcement agencies, including the Interior Ministry’s forces, (8) the Border Guard Service, and FAPSI, Russia’s equivalent of the National Security Agency. (9) During the summer of 2006, the Duma passed legislation allowing the FSB to operate abroad in hunting down terrorists, and other enemies of the state. (10) This legislation was significant in that operations on foreign soil traditionally have been the bailiwick of the SVR and the military’s GRU (who are attempting still to resist such encroachment). Given that fact, the legislation could be viewed as part of an effort to recreate a Soviet-style
super agency under its own authority. Now, the FSB has a new target: the Federal Guard Service.

The Federal Guard Service is Russia’s equivalent of the Secret Service, handling personal security for diplomats, state functionaries and important government facilities. It was established as an independent entity by Alexander Korzhakov during Boris Yel’tsin’s tenure as President. According to a recent press report, arguments are being made at high levels that a merger between the Service and the FSB would save the Russian state a considerable amount of money. (11) As yet, there has been no indication as to when such a takeover might occur. Given the FSB’s recent expansionist successes, there is little chance that the Guard Service will be able to resist. So far, only the GRU and SVR apparently have been able to resist the FSB’s “advances.” The FSB’s crusade to recreate the KGB goes on.

**Update: Borders**

In May 2005, General Vladimir Pronichev, Commander of Russia’s Border Guard Service, announced the beginning of a R15 Billion program designed to improve Russia’s border fortifications. The funds were to be spent on new outposts, as well as on radar and infra-red detection technologies. (12) On 2 August 2006, Kommersant broke the story that Russia was to recreate Soviet-era border zones, whereby 30 kilometer areas would be closed to the public and strictly controlled by the FSB. (13)

In an interview to mark Border Guards Day 2007, Pronichev noted that certain parts of the Border Service are to be decentralized, with control passing to district divisions and departments of the FSB. (14) Pronichev claimed that many of the construction projects announced in 2005 & 2006, including 37 new border stations in the North Caucasus, as well as housing and service facilities for the Russian-Kazakh border were close to completion. (15) 27 Border posts have
been upgraded to include new satellite communications, while unmanned aerial
drones have been introduced to cover certain border areas.

Pronichev’s Deputy, Lieutenant-General Nikolai Rybalkin also spoke to the press
as part of the Border Guards Day commemorations. The most notable part of his
comments was the disclosure that the size of control-zones (apparently
nationwide) would not exceed 15 kilometers, half of the 30 originally indicated,
and considerably “less than in the Soviet era.” (16) Three other Border Zones:
Sea of Azov, Kamchatka and Sakhalin will be abolished, apparently as a result of
arrangements with municipal authorities.

**GRU special forces killed in Chechnya**

On 27 April, a Mi-8 Hip helicopter carrying “military intelligence special forces”
apparently was “shot down” by Chechen rebels. Fifteen GRU operatives and the
helicopter’s three crew were killed when the helicopter crash-landed after
allegedly being hit by automatic weapons fire. (17) The GRU troops reportedly
were being flown in to support an assault on the Shatoy settlement 30 miles
south of Groznyy. (18)

A week after the crash, the commission set up to investigate the event revealed
that the GRU operatives were engaged in a hunt for Doku Umarov, a prominent
Chechen rebel commander wanted by Russia. Umarov apparently had been
sighted by Chechen forces loyal to Ramzan Kadyrov. Lacking the strength in
numbers to proceed alone, they called in reinforcements in the form of GRU
commandos. (19) The commission disputed the idea that the helicopter had
been brought down by enemy fire, claiming instead that the aircraft’s rotors had
touched nearby power cables, causing the pilot to lose control and crash. Upon
hitting the ground, the fuel lines ruptured, causing an explosion, which in turn
killed the passengers. The wreckage apparently showed no signs of “target
effects,” and no rebel gunmen were found to be in the area during the post-crash
sweep. (20)
Neither rebel fire, nor human error should be ruled out: yet a legitimate question can be asked: if the helicopter exploded due to a fuel-line rupture, how much wreckage survived to be examined by the authorities? Is it possible that Russia would rather lose elite operatives through an accident, than through enemy activity?

Source Notes:

(1) “Over 2 Million Secret Files Declassified in Past 15 Years—FSB,” RIA Novosti, 17 Apr 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(4) “Public Council; The FSB Will Heed The Opinions of Citizens,” Gazeta, 15 May 07; What the Papers Say via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Public Council; The FSB Will Heed The Opinions of Citizens,” Gazeta, 15 May 07; What the Papers Say via Lexis Nexis.
(10) “FSB Will Soon Run Operations Abroad,” The Moscow Times, 8 Jun 06, Russica izvestica Information via Lexis-Nexis.

(12) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XII, Number 4 (15 Jun 06).


(14) “Russia Border Guard Service Transfers to Territorial Control,” ITAR-TASS, 29 May 07 via Lexis-Nexis.

(15) Ibid.


(18) “Russian Helicopter Carrying GRU Special Forces ‘Shot Down,’ 18 Dead—Agency,” RIA-Novosti, Moscow, in Russian, 27 Apr 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(19) “Helicopter Crash in Chechnya: Human Error the Likeliest Explanation; MI-8 Crash in Chechnya Was Caused by Human Error,” Moskovsky komsomolets, 2 May 07 via Lexis-Nexis.

(20) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Alexey Dynkin

Appointment at Samara?

The Russia-EU summit which took place in Samara, Russia, on May 17-18 was widely described in negative terms. Nezavisimaya gazeta called it “most unproductive and, honestly, the least needed by either side,” (1) while both the Moscow Times, Gazeta.Ru, and the EU Observer agreed that the summit had not succeeded in producing any concrete results. (2) Nonetheless, some lessons
may be drawn from this meeting, both regarding Russia’s attitude toward Europe, and regarding the direction which the European Union seems to be taking in its relations with Russia.

The Samara meeting, as the Gazeta.Ru article notes, (3) was the first Russia-EU summit after elections in three of its major member states; Germany and Italy and, most recently, France elected leaders who have promised significant changes in their countries’ policies. This fact is significant when one considers that the previous three leaders – Gerhardt Schroeder, Silvio Berlusconi and Jacques Chirac (the first in particular) – were known for their close relations with Putin. Putin’s own harder line rhetoric on issues with Europe may encourage a harsher tone from European leaders, as well. In addition, the summit comes at a moment when Russia is involved in ongoing disputes with three EU member states – Poland over meat exports, Lithuania over oil supplies through the Druzhba pipeline, and most recently, Estonia over the transfer of a Soviet World War II memorial in Tallinn.

These factors, combined with the publicity that Putin has received as a result of the latest Dissenters’ March (which, however small and poorly organized, was nonetheless timed wisely to correspond with the summit and to take place in Samara itself), led to a summit that one observer described as “cooler than Munich.” (4) At one point during the meeting, Putin responded testily to criticism by EU President and German Chancellor Angela Merkel over the detention of “Other Russia” leaders Garry Kasparov and Eduard Limonov prior to the summit (in order to prevent them from participating in the Dissenters’ March). On one hand, he dismissed the opposition leaders as “insignificant;” on the other hand, he justified the arrests by pointing to recent arrests in Germany. “Police and law enforcement agencies in Europe also take preventive measures,” he said. “In Hamburg, 146 people were arrested and here, only 200 people wanted to demonstrate.” (5) Merkel responded by stating that there is a difference between detaining individuals who commit acts of violence and in detaining specific
individuals prior to a demonstration for the sole purpose of preventing them from participating in this demonstration. “Law enforcers have the right to use force and detain people if demonstrators turn violent and break windows,” she said. “If a person hasn’t done anything and is just on their way to a demonstration this is a different matter.” (6) Predictably, Putin also chided the EU leaders for ignoring the rights of Russian speakers in Estonia, taking care to remind them that a Russian citizen had been killed in the Tallinn riots (failing of course to mention that the Russian citizen is believed to have been stabbed by another rioter). (7) Later, he warned “European peoples” against providing “a stage for the Americans to flex their muscles,” in reference to the recent deployment of components of an American missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic. (8) In the end, for the first time ever in the history of Russia-EU summits, neither a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, nor a joint declaration was produced during the summit.

The Samara summit underlines what may be a shifting dynamic in the relationship between Russia and the European Union. While trading barbs on Russia’s democratic credentials and over the American military presence in the countries of the former Warsaw Pact is nothing new, the tone of the meeting (set by Merkel’s blunt criticism and her refusal to accept the usual “but you do the same” argument from Putin), and, even more, the willingness of the EU leaders to walk away from the summit without even a joint declaration, does represent a change. From the EU side, it appears that several factors were at work here. From the perspective of the EU as a whole, the purpose of the summit was to set a common policy toward Russia in a new political atmosphere. From the perspective of the new leaders of the “Big Three” of continental Europe (or at least Germany and France), the purpose was to depart from the legacy of their predecessors, and a revised position toward Russia is one important element of this. Finally, from the perspective of the newer EU member states of Eastern Europe, particularly those involved in current disputes with Russia, it was an
opportunity to demand solidarity from the rest of the Union; and in this they appear to have succeeded more so than in the past.

From the perspective of Russia, then, the summit may be taken as a sign that its European policy may have to be revised. In the past, it has been based primarily on bilateral relations with individual countries of the EU such as Schroeder's Germany, and rooted in economic agreements. In fact, the very idea of a Russia-EU relationship was to a large extent irrelevant for this reason – Russia could be confident of enjoying at least tacit support from several key European countries with which it had energy contracts and did not need to worry about disputes with the others. The latest summit, however, seems to indicate that initiating disputes with individual EU member states may have consequences. Thus, while the Samara summit may not have produced any concrete results, its very inconclusiveness may be a sign that the time has come for a genuine relationship to be established between Russia and a new, more unified European Union.

Source Notes:

(1) Nezavisimaya gazeta, 21 May 07, BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid, Gazeta.Ru.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Ibid, Moscow Times.
(8) Ibid.
ARMENIA

Elections maintain dominance of ruling parties

Parliamentary elections, held across Armenia on 12 May, resulted in the overwhelmingly popular reelection of former Defense Minister and current Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian’s Republican Party. The parliamentary elections are seen as a precursor to the presidential elections which will determine a successor to Robert Kocharian, whose term ends in 2008.

Of the 131 legislative seats under contention, 90 were to be elected by proportional representation based on party lists and 41 by first-past-the-post elections from single-mandate constituencies. The threshold to enter parliament is 5 percent. The pro-government Republican Party captured 64 seats in the new legislature, 25 seats more than it held in the last parliament. Two other pro-government parties took second and third place: Prosperous Armenia, a party that firmly supports President Kocharian, garnered 24 seats, while the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutiun Party received 16. The results give the Republican Party a near majority based on its own members and nearly an 80 percent majority with its two partners, Prosperous Armenia and the Dashnak Party.

The only two opposition parties to enter the legislature based on proportional representation were Orinats Yerkir, which was part of the ruling coalition in the last legislature until it went into the opposition in 2006, and the Heritage Party. Orinats Yerkir earned 9 seats and Heritage earned 7. The Dashink Party also earned one seat through a single-mandate constituency. (11)
The published results of the Central Election Commission (CEC) met with protests from opposition parties. Several of them, including the Hanrapetutiun Party and the People’s Party of Armenia, have stated their intention to appeal to the Constitutional Court for an annulment of the results. (2) Such a ruling would be extremely unlikely, but the probable failure of their cause did not prevent several thousand protesters from gathering in Yerevan to demonstrate against the election results.

The CEC has been subject to internal disagreement over the elections. Three of the CEC’s nine members refused to sign the preliminary and final protocols stating the results of the proportional voting, claiming that the accuracy of the tabulation was questionable because of reported violations, including alterations of voter lists and discrepancies between “certified polling station protocol copies” of the results and those submitted electronically. (3) The abstaining members of the board were those from the former Justice Alliance, Orinats Yerkir, and the National Unity Party.

The elections received an initially favorable response from the international community, which had exerted considerable pressure on Armenia to ensure that its elections were free and fair. The OSCE observer mission’s preliminary findings report characterized the 12 May proceedings as having “demonstrated improvement” over past elections, although the mission conceded that officials “were unable to fully deliver a performance consistent with their stated intention that the election would meet international standards.” (4) Subsequently, however, the observer mission toughened its language, publishing a detailed account of “inconsistencies” and “discrepancies” in the electoral process. (5)

A statement by the Russian Foreign Ministry lauded the elections as “transparent” and complying with democratic standards. (6) Throughout the campaigning period, Russian officials had spoken favorably of Prime Minister
Sarkisian, openly supporting his party’s bid and his role as potential successor to the current president, Robert Kocharian. (7)

**GEORGIA**

**Russian WTO talks stalled...again**

Georgia’s WTO membership remains the trump card in its dealings with Russia. Negotiations over Russia’s bid for WTO membership stalled yet again as officials met on 31 May in Tbilisi. The primary point of contention concerns customs at the Russian-Georgian borders in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia insists that Georgian customs officers man these borders, while Russia argues that this issue lies outside the purview of the WTO. Russia has sought to make the fulfillment of its agreements with Georgia contingent on Georgia giving the green light to Russia’s WTO admittance. “After entering the WTO, Russia, as a member of the organization, will honor all its commitments to Georgia,” said Maksim Medvedkov, the chief of the trade negotiations for the Russian Economic Development Ministry. (8)

**Friction in South Ossetia**

Tbilisi recently has adopted a different tactic in its dealings with Tskhinvali. In April, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili established a South Ossetian government to serve as an alternative to that of de facto South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity. The pro-Tbilisi provisional administration is headed by Dmitri Sanakoev, a veteran of the South Ossetian side of the Tbilisi-Tskhinvali battle. Sanakoev, whose government has been denounced by Kokoity, spoke on 11 May before the Georgian parliament, calling for a “comprehensive Georgian-Ossetian dialogue” that “must ultimately result in granting broad autonomy to the region and guaranteeing political representation and cultural identity to the Ossetian people within a unified state.” (9) Sanakoev’s administration will be installed in a newly opened Ossetian Cultural and Art Center in Tbilisi.
In the meantime, Tbilisi’s maneuvers have triggered increasing tension in South Ossetia. Both the Georgian and South Ossetian sides are rumored to be rebuilding their fortifications in the area, in anticipation of the outbreak of violent conflict. Most recently, disputes over the water supply both in South Ossetia and in Georgian controlled territory have raised the ire of both sides. Russian Ambassador to Georgia Vyacheslav Kovalenko has warned that the establishment of Sanakoev’s government could lead to “serious consequences.” Somewhat ominously, he also added that Russian citizens live in South Ossetia and that Russia is concerned about their condition, an obvious reference to Russia’s willingness to use its diaspora (and those made citizens by the wholesale issuance of passports in contested regions) as a wedge in negotiations with its neighbors.

Russia’s response to a possible clash between Tskhinvali and Tbilisi remains a significant question. Despite a strong relationship with Adjarian strongman Aslan Abashidze, Russia did not take a stand on Abashidze’s behalf when he was confronted by Tbilisi in May 2004, but instead arranged for his hasty exit to Moscow. Russia has taken a considerable interest in the separatist regions by encouraging economic ties and taking advantage of the relatively porous borders between the separatist regions and Russia. As mentioned above, it also has extended citizenship to a majority of the separatist regions’ inhabitants. Although it repeatedly affirms Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in its rhetoric, Russia consistently has supported Abkhazia and South Ossetia in practice. Its role in a potential Georgian-South Ossetian conflict could be pivotal.

Source Notes:


(7) “Armenian authorities resort to external assistance,” Kommersant, 9 Apr 07; What the Papers Say (WPS) via Lexis-Nexis.

(8) “Russia says WTO membership first, commitments to Georgia next,” RIA Novosti, 31 May 07 via Lexis-Nexis.


(10) “Russian ambassador slams ‘dangerous’ pro-Georgian South Ossetian administration,” Regnum, 30 May 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(11) “Armenian electoral body releases final results of parliamentary election,” Arminfo, 19 May 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

UZBEKISTAN

EU modifies sanctions against Uzbekistan

On 14 May the European Union’s Council of Foreign Ministers made the decision to modify slightly its sanctions against Uzbekistan by removing the names of four Uzbek officials from the EU’s visa ban list. (1) Ruslan Mirzaev (currently Minister
of Defense and formerly a national security advisor), Saidullo Begaliev (formerly the governor of Andijon Oblast’), Ismail Ergashev (formerly a top official in the Ministry of Defense), and Kossimali Akhmedov (formerly head of the Eastern Military District, including Andijon) now are all free to travel to any of the European Union states. (2) The remaining sanctions—the embargo on weapons, other military and police equipment, and dual-technology items—will stay in place, at least for the time being. (3) EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner explained the EU’s change of heart toward Uzbekistan by saying, “I think it’s important to keep up the sanctions on the one hand but, on the other hand, show that we also appreciate the first results that we have been having for the first time in the human rights [dialogue], for instance.” (4)

The EU Council’s decision apparently represented a compromise between German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who would have preferred to lift more of the sanctions, and a number of the other EU ministers (including those from Sweden and the United Kingdom), who wanted no softening of the sanctions at all. The EU’s official declaration on the sanctions states that it “stands ready to consider the lifting of restrictions” in case Uzbekistan’s government “engages constructively” by adopting international human rights standards. The EU statement also expressed concern at the Uzbek government’s most recent arrests of human rights activists and called on President Karimov to fulfill his promise to permit representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross to have access to his country’s prisons. (5) The EU Council will review all of the sanctions again in six months (6).

The office of the Uzbek foreign ministry reacted to the EU’s declaration in predictable fashion, calling the Council of Foreign Ministers’ decision “unfounded and biased,” as well as an “instrument of systematic pressure on Uzbekistan dressed up in human rights rhetoric.” The foreign ministry further stated that the EU Council’s initial decision to impose the sanctions and its subsequent renewals
of the sanctions were based on various human rights groups’ unsubstantiated reports of the Andijon events. The Uzbek government contends that the 2005 demonstration in Andijon was conducted by Islamic insurgents and portrays the unrest as “terrorist action aimed at usurping power,” (7) despite testimony to the contrary by numerous eyewitnesses.

Only one day after the EU Council of Foreign Ministers announced its decision to renew most of the sanctions, the Uzbek Justice Ministry declared that it may seek legal action against the Goethe Institute, a German NGO whose objectives are to facilitate international cooperation in the spheres of culture and the development of the German language abroad. A Justice Ministry official stated that the Goethe – Institute had committed serious violations of Uzbekistan’s laws by failing to provide a number of documents to the government, including its founding documents, an agreement on renting the office premises, the certification of power of attorney given to the mission head, a declaration of its financial sources and office expenditures, and a list of its staff and their salaries. The German NGO now has thirty days in which to produce these documents (8), in order to avoid being expelled from the country. If asked, the Justice Ministry undoubtedly would deny the fact that its censure of the Goethe – Institute is linked in any way to the EU Council’s decision, however, the timing does seem just a little too apt to constitute a mere coincidence.

The expectation that the Karimov regime will adopt international human rights standards is wishful thinking, at best – Uzbekistan’s leader has proven himself, time and again, to be on a single-minded mission to eradicate any and all opposition to his government. In fact, the Uzbek security services’ method of operations is to target not just those suspected of harboring anti-government sentiment, but their families and friends, as well – a method long employed in the Soviet Union against its dissidents and apparently maintained by the KGB’s and MVD’s successors in Uzbekistan. With the possibility of new presidential elections in December 2008 hanging in the air, it is extremely unlikely that
President Karimov will soften his stance toward those who dare to criticize his regime.

Germany’s motivation for persuading the EU to rescind the sanctions is purported to be its desire to obtain favorable concessions in Uzbekistan’s oil and gas industry. (9) However, a recent report by the International Crisis Group on energy resources in Central Asia suggests that Uzbekistan’s oil resources will run dry in the near future and that its natural gas reserves may have been vastly overestimated – to date, the only estimates that exist are those reported by Uzbekneftegaz (the state-run oil and gas company); no estimates have been permitted to be conducted by any outside, independent agencies. (10) Thus, Germany’s hopes may be for naught and even if Uzbekistan's natural gas reserves live up to their estimated potential, the lifting of the EU’s sanctions is no guarantee that the Uzbek government will choose to sell its gas to Western Europe, without substantial financial incentives, which up to now, the EU has not been willing to offer.

KYRGYZSTAN

Anti-US sentiment on the rise in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyz parliamentary deputies, as well as some opposition activists, are once again trying to pressure their government to terminate its agreement with the US Air Force for the lease of the Manas Air Base, which is used by the 376th Expeditionary Wing to provide support for US military operations in Afghanistan. The base was established in December 2001 (11) and has been a point of increasing controversy for the past year, beginning with the renewal of the lease agreement in summer 2006. After numerous rounds of negotiations, the US side agreed to increase its payments from $2 million to $150 million in total aid and compensation annually, (12) which seemed to put the Kyrgyz government’s main concerns to rest, until a Kyrgyz civilian, Aleksandr Ivanov, who was delivering fuel supplies to the Manas Air Base was shot and killed by US serviceman Zachary Hatfield in December 2006, allegedly in self-defense. (13)
This incident provoked a storm of indignation in the Kyrgyz government, leading to demands by the parliament that US servicemen’s diplomatic immunity status (which protects them from criminal prosecution by Kyrgyz authorities) be lifted, that Zachary Hatfield be handed over to Kyrgyz law enforcement personnel for prosecution, and that the Kyrgyz government consider terminating its lease agreement with the US Air Force for the Manas base. (14) President Kurmanbek Bakiev supported the parliament’s demands and instructed his foreign ministry to look into the possibility of amending the lease agreement in such a way as to rescind the US servicemen’s immunity. (15) To date, no changes have been made to the lease agreement, however, Kyrgyz sentiment vis à vis the airbase and toward the US government, in general, has continued to spiral downward.

The Delo No newspaper published an interview with Kyrgyz military expert Leonid Bondarets in its 31 January issue, in which Mr. Bondarets expressed the opinion that the presence of the US air base in Kyrgyzstan actually poses a threat to the country’s security, by making it a possible target of anti-American attacks. (16) The anti-US hyperbole escalated a bit further when Interfax published a comment by an anonymous source in the Kyrgyz security forces, who alleged that the US Air Force could be storing nuclear weapons at the Manas base: “It is currently impossible to rule out the possibility of such nuclear weapons being stored there because Kyrgyz customs bodies do not check the goods arriving at the Manas air base today…If nuclear weapons are brought to Manas along with other goods customs officers do not know about this.” Both US Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Marie Yovanovitch and a second source in the security forces, also anonymous, have denied these allegations, (17) but their denials seem to have done little to calm the storm of anti-US rhetoric.

The issue of the US air base exploded onto the Kyrgyz headlines again in early May, when chairman of the Jogorku Kengesh (Kyrgyz parliament) Defense Committee Rashid Tagaev, commenting on a 10 May report by the Aziyainform agency, which was quoting Middle East Newsline, told the Kyrgyz news agency
24.kg: “I have no doubt that if military action starts, the USA will carry out bombing raids on Iran from the Manas air base in Kyrgyzstan.” The Aziyainform report apparently stated that the US Department of Defense was considering using the Manas Air Base as one launching point for air attacks against Iran. Mr. Tagaev then proceeded to point out his country’s vulnerability to a counterattack by Iran: “Regarding official Tehran's promise to carry out retaliatory strikes on places from which American missiles and aircraft are coming, one Iranian missile is enough for Kyrgyzstan.” (18) Despite denials by Kyrgyz officials that Manas would be used as a base for US air strikes against Iran, as well as Ambassador Yovanovitch’s assurances that the air base’s mandate is exclusively for the purpose of supporting US operations in Afghanistan and that the US has no intention of violating the base agreement and thereby jeopardizing its mission in Afghanistan, (19) Kyrgyz public opinion seems to have turned against the US and calls for shutting down Manas air base continue to flood the Kyrgyz media. Both President Bakiev’s supporters and a number of opposition leaders have voiced sharp criticism of the base, as well as of US influence in Kyrgyzstan, in general. Concern over the base’s environmental impact also has been raised, leading the Kyrgyz State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry (SAEPF) to demand that the US Air Force pay 20.64 million Kyrgyz soms (approximately US $545,000) as compensation for damage caused by at least a dozen instances of jet fuel dumping. (20)

Remarkably, most Kyrgyz politicians and media pundits seem quite unconcerned about any detrimental effects of the Russian military base in Kant (suburb of Bishkek) on the country’s environment. Nor do any of Kyrgyzstan’s lawmakers seem at all troubled over Russian political influence in their own country or in the region as a whole. In fact, Jogorku Kengesh speaker Marat Sultanov voiced the viewpoint that the Kant base is not really a foreign base at all, because both Kyrgyzstan and Russia are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO): “The base at Kant is a base of the CSTO, and therefore it is also a Kyrgyz base. Nobody can say that it is a foreign base. It is true that
most of the troops there are Russian officers, but it is also a Kyrgyz base. For this reason, I think we have only one foreign base.” (21) Perhaps this is also the reason why the Kyrgyz government has not demanded any rent payments in return for Russia’s use of the Kant facilities.

Kyrgyz furor over the US presence at the Manas air base seems completely out of proportion to actual events. Zachary Hatfield’s shooting of truck driver Aleksandr Ivanov, while the latter was making a fuel delivery was tragic and extremely unfortunate and was handled badly by US Air Force personnel, who at first offered Ivanov’s widow only a very small settlement, which was not increased until she sought legal assistance. However, this tragedy aside, the Kyrgyz government receives numerous benefits from the Manas air base, not the least of which is monetary compensation for the US’s lease of the base facilities, as well as wages for the many civilians who work at the base and payments for food and other supplies that the base requires. The US Air Force also has provided Kyrgyz military and security service personnel with various types of equipment and training. The question, then, is from where does this renewed and sometimes nearly hysterical spate of anti-US sentiment emanate?

The war in Iraq may be affecting public opinion negatively, but even the worst revelations about US actions in Iraq did not spawn the type of rhetoric in which Kyrgyz politicians now are engaging. Who stands to benefit most from exerting pressure on the US government and/or forcing the closure of the Manas air base? The Russian journal Kommersant posits that it is President Bakiev who is behind the most recent push to close the base, at Moscow’s behest. Kommersant claims to have information that the Russian government has struck a deal with Bakiev to support his presidency, in return for his promise to shut down the US air base, possibly even before the end of the summer. The article alleges that China also has lent its support to the Kyrgyz president, pledging to help finance the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in August, if
he orders the closure of the base. (22) Whether or not there is any truth to these allegations, remains to be seen.

Source Notes:

(1) “EU extends sanctions against Uzbekistan,” 14 May 07, ITAR-TASS; OSC Translated Excerpt via World News Connection.


(3) “EU extends sanctions against Uzbekistan,” 14 May 07, ITAR-TASS; OSC Translated Excerpt via World News Connection.


(5) Ibid.

(6) “Uzbekistan Rebuffs EU Sanctions,” 17 May 07, Turkish Daily News; Middle East Intelligence Wire via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(7) Ibid.


(13) “U.S. military spokesman says Kyrgyzstan shooting appears to come under immunity agreement,” 8 Dec 06, The Times of Central Asia via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(18) “Kyrgyz MP Says Has "No Doubt" USA Will Use Kyrgyz Base If Attacks Iran,” 11 May 07, 24.kg; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(19) “US Envoy Rejects Possible Use Of Air Base In Kyrgyzstan Against Iran,” 22 May 07, AKIpress; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

MOLDOVA

Moldova’s Communists stay in control thanks to the Democrats

On 3 June, Moldovans went to the polls for mayoral and local council elections, seen as an indicator of attitudes in advance of the 2009 parliamentary vote. Given the outcome of the local elections, the ruling Communist Party should be concerned. But given history, the party’s leaders may have little to worry about, as its opponents rarely have the ability to take advantage of electoral opportunities.

The preliminary results of the elections have been reported differently in several media outlets, all of which claim to quote the Central Election Commission. The most reliable data appear to come from the Moldpres News Agency, which showed that the Communist Party placed first in 277 of the country’s 898 mayoral races. (1)

Two liberal, West-leaning forces followed. The Moldova Noastra Alliance (MNA, 152 seats or 16.88%), and Democratic Party of Moldova (DP, 74 seats or 8.29%) placed first in a significant number of mayoral races. The Infotag News Agency reported also that the Christian Democratic Popular Party (CDPP, 72 or 8.05%) did well, achieving fourth place. (2)

Many of these mayoral races will go to run-offs, because the winners failed to score the required 50% of the vote. However, the CEC did not immediately make clear which, or how many, of the 898 races would be affected. This could make a significant difference, since pro-West forces do considerably better in head-to-head races than in large fields.
In the capital, there will be a mayoral run-off in two weeks, as first place Communist candidate, Veaceslav Iordan, scored only 28% of the vote. This result likely is a disappointment, given the Communist Party’s push to finally take control of Chisinau, the only major city where non-Communist forces have maintained significant influence. Liberal Party candidate Dorin Chirtoaca placed second with 24.64% of the vote, while the MNA, Democratic Party and Party of Social Democracy candidates followed with roughly 8% each.

Additionally, the Communists won almost 30% of the seats in the Chisinau city council, with the Liberal Party (19%), MNA (11%), Democratic Party (6.6%) and CDPP (6%) following.

The results make one point abundantly clear – those opposing the Communist Party missed a genuine opportunity to work together to increase their influence. In fact, at a time when Moldovans appear to be growing disenchanted with the Communists, who have been in power since 2001, the liberal democratic forces could have scored decisive victories in key areas – had they united.

A decrease in Communist support is apparent when comparing these results to the previous local elections in 2003. At that time, the Communist Party earned 41% of all mayoral seats. This means that the Party lost approximately 90 seats in the current election.

Also in 2003, the Communist Party won just under 45% of all local council seats and 48% of all municipal seats (which translated into 54% of all municipal mandates because of threshold requirements). In last weekend’s election, the Communists saw those percentages shrink to 35% and 36%, respectively.

This loss occurred even though most election observation missions found that the electoral atmosphere leading up to the poll was not conducive to fair elections. The Civic Coalition for Free and Fair Elections 2007, consisting of
seven independent Moldovan NGOs, monitored the campaign period and election-day.

The group found that “administration of the election was often biased, especially in terms of registration of contestants, exclusion of contestants from the electoral race, challenging of CEC decisions and delay in examining complaints. Ballots were compiled with several inaccuracies….” Furthermore, the group compared this election to those previously monitored by its members in 2003 and 2005. “In this campaign,” the coalition wrote, “administrative resources were widely used, and intimidation of electoral contestants occurred in an unprecedented and alarming proportion. Also, the practice of ‘purchasing’ votes was evident.” (4)

The OSCE/ODIHR Mission to Moldova noted similar problems. “One of the hallmarks of a democratic election is the ability for candidates to run for office on an equal basis, free from intimidation,” said Ambassador Dieter Boden, head of the ODIHR mission. "There were a number of cases throughout the country where candidates faced pressure or dismissal or suspension from their jobs as a result of their political activities.” The OSCE/ODIHR preliminary mission report, which included observations from 200 monitors, also noted extensive, sometimes unequal media coverage of state authorities during the campaign and a number of cases where local authorities failed to guarantee equal conditions for all parties and candidates. (5)

Nevertheless, the Communists were unable to match their performance in 2003. This is largely due to general frustration among the Moldovan voters caused by continuing economic stagnation, leading to the highest level of poverty in Europe, a failure to integrate successfully into any international groupings, and the inability of the government to deal with the separatist republic of Transnistria. A poll by the IMAS agency in March found that 54% of the country is “dissatisfied with the current state of affairs in Moldova.” Thirty-three percent of those polled responded that they were satisfied, while 13% did not provide an answer. (6)
Still, even with all of this, the parties opposing the Communists have been unable to provide an alternative. All of the “democratic” parties listed above have, at one time or another, formed coalitions with each other. These coalitions were beset with bickering and backstabbing, and consequently were unable to formulate effective plans. They all fell apart under their own top-heavy weight.

As in most post-Soviet states, party leaders often are unable to refuse “incentives” provided to them by the ruling government, and consequently are unable (or unwilling) to develop an effective opposition.

Because the opposition parties are now splintered into five or more entities, their votes were split in the mayoral races. This fact allowed the Communists to win a plurality of mayoral seats. If, for example, the Liberal Party, MNA, Popular Social Democratic Party, Moldovan Democratic Party and Christian Democratic Popular Party had united in the Chisinau mayoral race, they would have won 53% of the vote, and a run-off would be unnecessary. This is assuming, of course, that they could have formulated a unified, effective campaign strategy. They have not done so in any election so far.

Therefore, when looking forward, the opposition to the Communist Party should be optimistic. Even fragmented, pressured, and facing a virtual media blockade, its parties were able to increase their representation throughout the country. But, their short term successes have never translated into an ability to score large, long term wins. That could change in 2009, if Moldova’s non-Communist leaders are finally able to put aside their personal animosities and respond to the concerns of their citizens.

Source Notes:

(1) “Central Election Commission announces preliminary outcome of general local elections in Moldova,” Moldpres, 4 Jun 07. Numbers are the authors own
estimates based on provided percentages. For example, Moldpres reports that the Communist Party won 30.81% of 898 races, according to the CEC. The author estimates this figure at 277 seats.


(3) European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity – Moldova Update, 18 Sep 06 via www.europeanforum.net/country/moldova.


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