Zubkov told not to get too comfy in PM chair

When President Putin nominated Viktor Zubkov as prime minister in September, a significant part of the response to the appointment was consideration of Zubkov's suitability as a possible presidential successor. Undue focus on elections and succession, according to Putin's initial statement on the resignation of the Fradkov government, is what led, in part, to the change in government personnel; a continued debate over a post-Putin Russia would serve only to weaken Putin's current status; such is the nature of "lame duck" syndrome. The shuffle of ministers should have revealed Putin's displeasure—the ousted ministers either were too ambitious or too open in their support for a successor—or, at the very least, it should have signaled a new direction to expect from the Zubkov-led government.

Initial reports suggested that a new government would be put together by Zubkov, approved by Putin and announced on September 21st. (1) As it turns out, Zubkov submitted at least two (and reportedly four) different iterations of the government line-up, only to be rejected by Putin. (2) The final composition of the government clearly was the result of significant bargaining, demonstrated most clearly by the reappearance of Anatoli Serdyukov as defense minister. It is certainly unusual for an individual who provides a "double resignation" (when the government resigned, Serdyukov's resignation could have been assumed, but it was announced separately as an "anti-nepotism" measure) to be reappointed, unless the resignation is meant to rally support around a cause (for example, the unaccepted resignations of Gaidar and other economic reformers at key
moments—usually prior to parliamentary congresses—during the Yeltsin administration).

The Zubkov draft versions of the government have not been published, but it seems clear either that certain ministers he wanted removed have remained or that some, with whom he would have preferred not to serve, have been appointed, and, in exchange, Serdyukov was allowed to retain his post, despite the noisy resignation.

With so few changes to the government, it shouldn’t be too difficult to narrow down the potential conflicts. The resignations of the oft-criticized Social Policy Minister Zurabov and the perennially unpopular German Gref were not unexpected. Recently released opinion polls highlighted citizen disaffection with the two (also, Aleksei Kudrin, who, of course, was promoted in the reshuffle). (3) Gref was also the recipient of a public presidential expression of displeasure at a recent government meeting, an excerpt of which was released by the Kremlin. (4)

Perhaps most notable among the changes is the re-emergence of Dmitri Kozak on the Moscow scene as the Minister for Regional Development. Kozak was the author of at least three major reform attempts during Putin's administration: regional reform (which was partly implemented, then some of the reforms abandoned, but the goals of regional "coordination" with the federal center remain a strong focus); judicial reform (which, as with many reforms, remains unimplemented but still debated); and administrative reform (several of Kozak's recommendations, including changes to the number of deputies in each ministry and changes to the status of both Kremlin and ministerial personnel were implemented with the announcement of the reform initiative).

Zubkov’s displeasure with the civil service reforms, and by extension Kozak, may have been displayed in an interesting side note on the formation of his government. In announcing the changes to the government at its first sitting on
24 September, President Putin remarked, "At the Prime Minister's request, two new committees were created...." (5) State committees had been one of the targets of Kozak's reforms, which were meant to slash government and Kremlin duplication of authority and the volume of personnel (in addition to other cost saving measures). (6)

It certainly is worth noting that two women were added to the cabinet: Elvira Sakhipzadovna Nabiullina was appointed Economic Development and Trade Minister. The outgoing minister, German Gref referred to his former deputy and newly-named successor as "one of the most highly-skilled experts in Russia." (7) Nabiullina most recently was head of the Center for Strategic Research and worked on implementation of President Putin's (and Dmitri Medvedev's) national priority projects program. Putin also named Tatiana Golikova as Health and Social Development Minister. Golikova previously worked in the Finance Ministry, eventually becoming first deputy finance minister under Aleksei Kudrin. In a shrug to nepotism concerns, Golikova, notably, is the wife of the Viktor Khristenko, Minister for Industry and Energy. (8)

No sooner was the structure of the new government announced, than President Putin tossed it onto the trash heap of irrelevance with an unexpected announcement of his own. During closing remarks to the United Russia Congress, Putin noted that he was a founder of United Russia, if not a member, and went on to consider a proposal for him to head up the government as "an entirely realistic" possibility. (9)

Putin coyly hedged his remarks by noting that it was entirely too early to "talk about this at the moment," but then listed two preconditions for him to assume the prime minister's seat: 1) United Russia would need to win in the December elections. If there had been any concern about United Russia's electoral success, Putin's decision to stand as the leading member on the party's list probably will assure United Russia's victory; and 2) "[V]oters would have to elect
a decent, effective and modern-thinking President with whom it would be possible to work together." (10) Perhaps Putin would have been well served to have been reminded that this new President would have to choose to nominate him as prime minister, unless constitutional changes to reassign the authority to name the government from the executive to the legislative branch are in the offing.

Putin's decision to tie himself to United Russia and to consider the prime ministerial slot was well received in the financial world, where stability in Russia generally is more highly-valued than is strengthening democratic processes. This move, however, could have significant long-term consequences that benefit both Russia's financial future and its democratic political development.

In the short term, Putin likely has assured himself continued relevance, even dominance in Russia (assuming that some segment of the apparatchiki already are working on the relevant constitutional changes), and the short term consequences of that might not prove beneficial to Russia's population. (If Putin, Zubkov, and other "investigators" in the Kremlin and government initiate a wide-scale corruption purge as a lead up to elections, his continued leadership might not even benefit most members of his administration.)

However, the long-term consequences of curtailing the broadly-defined powers of the Russian executive could prove essential to Russia's political development, post-Putin, into a more balanced regime with strong legislative checks over executive powers. Now, if only a strong judiciary would emerge….

Source Notes:
(1) RIA-Novosti, 21 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Creelea Henderson

Russia’s broken reproductive cycle
The hubbub surrounding upcoming elections in Russia is sounding an alarm, alerting Russia-watchers that the approaching months bring an uncertain future
for the country. Taking the long view, however, one overwhelming certainty for the future of the country has reemerged in recent news reports: Russia is facing a precipitous demographic downslide. The issue is not in itself news; it has been a topic of painstaking analysis and discussion ever since the annual number of deaths surpassed the number of births in Russia back in the mid-nineteen nineties. (1) In fact, recent headlines have been testament to the intensive efforts of the Russian government—ranging from the rigorous to the ridiculous—to check the downward trend.

In July of this year, an ingenious article appeared in a Moscow-based news magazine, The Exile, reviewing the pro-child phenomenon that is sweeping the advertising scene in Russia. (2) Under the headline “The Babies Are Coming!” the author of the piece, Alex Shifrin, compiles a list of examples of public service announcements that have been popping up around Moscow as part of a government campaign to encourage Russians to have more babies. Private companies have embraced the “2007: Year of the Child” zeitgeist as well, transforming the cityscape into a nursery-land plastered with infant-themed placards. Shifrin concludes that babies are the new “it” accessory for Russia’s style-makers, marking a tremendous shift in social mores in the hedonism-fueled metropolis of Moscow.

The billboards mentioned by Shifrin merely gloss the surface of more substantive state policies, however. A particular favorite with international news services was the initiative announced by the governor of central Russia’s Ulyanovsk Region, where September 12 was declared “Day of Family Contact.” (3) Locals, given the day off from work, were encouraged to stay home for the holiday and improve the birth rate, with inducements promised to mothers lucky enough to qualify for the “Give Birth to a Patriot on Russia’s Day!” grand prize. Baby-patriots born on June 12 (Russia’s Day), exactly nine months after the September 12 holiday, will be welcomed with a Ulyanovsk Automobile Factory (UAZ) “Patriot” SUV, though the governor’s office made it clear that an offer of cash, refrigerators, televisions and
cars extended to any local mother who gives birth to a third child. (4) Tony Halpin of the London Times reports that three years into the Ulyanovsk campaign, the scheme appears to be working, if measured in the number of babies born (78) on Russia’s Day, June 12, as compared to the average daily birthrate (26) in the region. (5)

Nevertheless, laying aside levity, the broader demographics remain grim. According to the State Statistics Service, in the first six months of 2007, 753,000 children were born in Russia. (6) While that figure marks a 5 percent increase over the same period in 2006, it is still only 71 births for every 100 deaths in the country. Given the current average of 1.3 children born to every Russian mother, the country’s population, although temporarily buoyed by a mini-boom, is poised to plummet anew when the much smaller generation of women born early in the 1990s reaches reproductive age in the coming decade. In order to halt and reverse this trend, President Vladimir Putin decided to draw from the country’s jealously guarded oil and gas resource-fed Stabilization Fund in 2006 to finance an ambitious nation-wide demographic project. (7) In a hotly-disputed move last year, the Putin administration introduced a system of rewards for mothers bearing a second child, including “maternal capital” amounting to 250,000 rubles alongside free medical care for all maternity cases. (8)

Next year, when the Russian president hands over executive power to a successor, he will be ceding his demographic program as well. In recent remarks, President Putin expressed confidence that there will be continuity in the state’s demographic policy, but added “and what will happen in 2012? You know, it is hard to say.” (9) Difficult as it may be to say, the United Nations survey of world population prospects anticipates a reduction of the Russian population by over 6 million in the coming decade, from 142,499,000 people today, down to only 136,479,000 in 2015. (10) A rule of thumb among economists holds that a country’s potential for long-term growth can be calculated from its population plus productivity growth. Russia’s population, trapped in a downward spiral, is a
sobering indicator of the country’s potential in the near future. This is a national tragedy, unfolding through generations of Russians.

Perhaps the national stress is beginning to tell in hostile relations with Russia’s neighbors. On September 24, Vyacheslav Kovalenko, Russia’s ambassador to Georgia, was summoned before the Georgian Foreign Ministry to answer for comments he made during a globalization meeting the week prior. Noting that only 3 million Georgians live in their home state, he said, “you have turned into relict and dying-out nation. Russia is an enormous state, it is able to digest demographic difficulties, but you, the Georgians, won’t get through this problem, you will disappear.” (11) Nino Burjanadze, Speaker of the Georgian parliament suggested that Ambassador Kovalenko should focus on the demographic issues within his own country, rather than turning outward on Georgia. (12)

Source Notes:
(3) Anna Arutunyan and Kirill Bessonov, “New Holiday to Boost Birth Rate,” Moscow News (Russia), 14 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) Tony Halpin, “Make love for Motherland and win a refrigerator,” The Times (London), 13 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Ibid.
(8) Ibid.
Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

Politkovskaya update: Russia persists with “Berezovsky connection”

During the last six weeks, there have been significant developments in the Anna Politkovskaya murder case. On 27 August, Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika held a press conference, the purpose of which was to announce several arrests. According to Chaika, ten individuals, including a serving FSB Officer, named as Lieutenant-Colonel Pavel Ryaguzov, had been detained in relation to the case. (1)

Chaika claimed that the individuals arrested were part of a “criminal group,” run by an individual who lives abroad. This group, according to Chaika, not only killed Politkovskaya, but also was responsible for the murders of Paul Klebnikov and former Central Bank Deputy Chairman Andrei Kozlov. The goal of this conspiracy was to return Russia to “the old system of government in which money and the oligarchs decided all.” (2) The unnamed individual living abroad only sought to destabilize Russia. Clearly, this language was a not-so-subtle reference to Boris Berezovsky, whom the Kremlin already has accused of an amazingly broad array of crimes.
Ryaguzov’s arrest posed a problem for authorities: if Berezovsky (as the Kremlin insists) has “agents” in the Security Services, then by extension, the loyalty of said services should be placed under a microscope. Apparently, this problem was noted: three days after his arrest, the FSB reversed its course, claiming that Ryaguzov’s detention was unrelated to the Politkovskaya probe and insisting that his arrest was related purely to matters of corruption. (3)

On 12 September, authorities arrested Shamil Burayev, a former Chechen presidential candidate and opponent of President Ramzan Kadyrov, at his residence in Moscow. Nine days later, Burayev’s lawyer, Pyotr Kazadov, informed the press that his client had been charged under Articles 33 and 105 of the Russian criminal code. (4) The indictment against Burayev alleges his complicity in Politkovskaya’s murder. Specifically, Burayev is accused of acting as an intermediary – of hiring Ryaguzov to act as reconnaissance man in the murder. (5) Burayev allegedly received reports on Politkovskaya from the FSB officer, and then passed them on to the two individuals accused of carrying out the killing.

On the same day that Burayev’s lawyer spoke to the press, Russian authorities again reversed course on Ryaguzov. Moscow District’s military court announced that it could find no fault with Ryaguzov’s arrest. The court apparently found no evidence contradicting the Prosecutor General’s allegation that Ryaguzov was “responsible for illegal penetration into a private home.” (6) A “source close to the investigation” added that Ryaguzov, “acting at the request of one Shamil Burayev, found out Politkovskaya’s address…” (apparently from the FSB’s database) “and shared that information with him.” (7)

Since Chaika’s comments late in August, Russian authorities have not mentioned Berezovsky’s name in connection with the Politkovskaya investigation. The press has not been so silent. On 18 September—six days after Burayev’s arrest—Izvestia ran a story attempting to link Burayev and Berezovsky. Both individuals,
Izvestia claimed, had been “able to reach agreement” with Chechen fighters involved in the spate of kidnappings that occurred early in the first Chechen war. Izvestia speculated that Berezovsky and Burayev had become acquainted in Chechnya and had become “partners.” (8) Politkovskaya, so Izvestia claimed, had been killed as part of an attempt to “hurt Kadyrov,” and by extension, President Vladimir Putin. (9)

As yet, authorities have not issued a detailed brief on their case, laying out specifically how they believe Berezovsky was involved. Given the persistence with which the “conspiracy” is being pushed, such a dossier surely will not be long coming. It seems that no matter how absurd the idea of his involvement actually is, the Kremlin is determined to keep pushing the notion that Berezovsky poses an imminent threat to stability in Russia, and that he is a danger to the very existence of the regime.

**Kazakh border update: Will there be new “closed zones”?**
During the last 18 months, Russia has begun a major program designed to improve its border control. In the spring of 2005, General Vladimir Pronichev, Head of the Border Guards Service (BGS), announced that R15 Billion would be used to upgrade facilities in the south, particularly in the Caucasus region, with new technologies, including infra-red, radar and television sensors. (10) Four months later, in September 2005, Pronichev’s deputy, Lieutenant-General Viktor Trufanov announced that the BGS 2006 budget would contain a further R6.2 Billion earmarked for the construction of new facilities. (11)

A centrally important—but little discussed—aspect of the border improvement program, was the re-introduction of Soviet-style “closed zones” whereby vast swathes of territory, amounting to 550,000 square kilometers of land, would be placed under direct FSB control. (12)
In June of this year, a possible explanation for the re-introduction of closed zones appeared when FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev admitted that security officials in Russia were concerned deeply by the level of security at Russia’s nuclear facilities and by the possibility that terrorists might gain access to fissile materiel. (13)

Two weeks ago, Patrushev presided over a meeting of the Russian National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC). Speaking to his regional subordinates, Patrushev noted that the “criminal situation in the fuel-energy complex” in the Urals was “difficult enough,” (14) and that “sabotage attacks on these facilities can have catastrophic consequences.” (15) While Patrushev intimated that the threat to the energy sector was the most important, he also listed illegal immigration, organized crime activity and “intense activity” by “religious extremists”—read the flow of fighters through Central Asia to Chechnya—as threats to Russia. (16)

Addressing the press after the NAC meeting, Patrushev claimed that, of 25 checkpoints currently in existence along the Russian-Kazakh border, “more than half” failed to meet standards. The Border Guard Service is to build 169 new facilities, and work is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011. (17)

During the Soviet era, many of the USSR’s nuclear installations were in northern Kazakhstan, specifically around the city of Semipalatinsk. The Baikonur Cosmodrome, located in Kazakhstan, is still run by Russia and remains a closed zone. (18) On 28 September, CIS forces ran a major anti-terror operation at Baikonur, as it is said to hold a position “high” on the “hit list of international terrorists.” (19) Patrushev’s announcement on border improvements likely was timed to precede the exercise and to forestall any criticism from higher levels, should major flaws in security be found at the site during maneuvers.

Given the current instability in the Persian Gulf and the rising tensions between the western powers and Iran, Russia’s concern over its energy supplies is at
least understandable. But it is unacceptable for “energy security” (as seems to be the case) to be used as the latest excuse to return to the ultra-secrecy of the Soviet era.

Source Notes:
(1) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIV, Number 1 (20 Sep 07).
(2) “Man Who Ordered Politkovskaya Murder Is Outside Russia, Says Chief Prosecutor,” Channel One Worldwide (for Europe), Moscow, in Russian, 27 Aug 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) “Arrest of FSB Officer Not Related to Politkovskaya Murder Probe,” ITAR-TASS, Moscow, in Russian, 30 Aug 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(4) “Investigative Committee Declines to Comment On Indictment in Politkovskaya Murder Case,” Interfax, 22 Sep 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(5) Chechnya’s Burayev Charged With Complicity in Politkovskaya Murder,” ITAR-TASS, 21 Sep 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(6) “Court Says FSB Officer Ryaguzov’s Arrest On New Charges Legal,” ITAR-TASS, 21 Sep 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(7) Ibid.
(9) Ibid.
(10) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XII, Number 4 (15 June 06).
Fall recruitment highlights military’s problems
Russia’s autumn draft began on Monday, October 1. This was the second recruitment (the first one being last April) to take place under the new, shortened 18-month term of service – and also the last, since the term is to be further shortened to 12 months, beginning in 2008. (1) As in the past, the military’s recruitment goals are hampered by massive problems of evasion and desertion – problems exacerbated by the fact that reduced service terms require larger numbers of conscripts at each recruitment in order to maintain the same force levels as in the past. (2) And, as in the past, the military’s efforts to improve its recruitment abilities fail to address the central problems that it faces.
This year, these efforts appear to be led by Russia’s main military legal body, Glavnaya Voyennaya Prokuratura (GVP) or Office of the General Military Procurator. For example, on Saturday, September 29, two days before the beginning of the recruitment, the GVP hosted a one-day legal information session. According to a GVP representative, more than 2,000 prosecutors and investigators were to take part in the session, which was held in all branches of the armed forces. (3) The representative said that the sessions involved military personnel of all ranks, as well as their families, and that servicemen and their families were offered general legal information and given the opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification, via group meetings, “round table” discussions and receptions – particularly in regard to questions of “social guarantees.” (4) The office also made assurances that it would review all cases it received and make every effort to “prevent violations of the law and restore [individuals’] rights.” (5) In addition to the legal information sessions, officers in recruitment centers were briefed on legal procedures and on how to handle legal matters during the conscription period. (6)

The GVP appeared to continue its efforts during the recruitment period itself. On October 1, it announced that “hot lines” would be established through which “servicemen, conscripts, their relatives and other citizens may seek consultation on questions of conscription and military service, and may also report violations of the law made by recruiters or other ranking personnel.” (7) The office reported that during the springtime conscription around 3,000 complaints were received by telephone, in writing or in person, and 1,600 legal violations established on the part of recruitment centers. (8) It did not specify the nature of these violations, nor did it comment on whether the individuals responsible for them ever were prosecuted, much less whether or not they were punished in any way. In general, the GVP made no effort to suggest what typically constitutes a legal violation in the recruitment process, presumably leaving those questions to be asked by means of the hot line.
The legal sessions and the establishment of hot lines appear to be part of an effort to address the Russian military’s endemic problem of military lawlessness and corruption – a problem highlighted by recent highly-publicized incidents of extremely brutal hazing, such as that of Private Andrei Sychev last year (in an incident that left him crippled for life). These problems are seen (quite correctly) as one of the major obstacles to the successful fulfillment of recruitment goals. Cases such as Sychev’s illustrate how difficult it is for young recruits facing abuse from older soldiers or superior officers to seek help through legal channels before it becomes too late. Presumably, then, the recent legal efforts are intended to assure conscripts that they have certain rights to which they are entitled, and that legal means are available to them, should trouble arise.

It sounds like a step in the right direction, but there are a number of problems. First, the Russian military’s past record of concern for the rank-and-file does not inspire confidence that such measures will result in much improvement. Even if military prosecutors begin to show a real interest in investigating and punishing cases of abuse, there is no guarantee that all or even most cases will be reported. Second, although these steps may be of some use to those who already have suffered abuse or otherwise have been affected negatively by illegal practices, they do not address the problem of the practices themselves. For that to happen, additional legal steps would have to be taken that would make life difficult for violators, such as introducing harsher penalties. Finally, these measures are relatively limited, whereas the reasons for the Russian military’s recruitment difficulties are manifold and have to do with Russian society as a whole, not just the military.

For instance, another possible explanation for Russia’s military recruitment shortages is that many young men who might otherwise serve in the armed forces (that is, under the Ministry of Defense) serve instead in the various organs under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD – Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del) either in the internal troops, the OMON and other special police units, or as regular
policemen. As of 2004, the interior forces counted more than 150,000 active-duty troops; (9) the total number of policemen in the various branches is more difficult to estimate, but it is quite high and, more importantly, Russian police forces tend to be much younger than their American or European counterparts, which suggests that joining the police force may be one of the methods, albeit less than ideal, of avoiding conscription for young Russian men who do not have money, education or connections. The other possible explanation for the relative youth of Russian policemen is that the low pay and often dangerous work probably discourages older people from joining; the result, however, is that employment shortcomings in police recruitment may produce a noticeable effect on the recruitment capabilities of the military organs. If that is the case, then it is not solely the military that must be reformed in order to address recruitment problems, but the MVD, as well.

To some extent, resistance to conscription may be a natural human reaction to being forced to do something one does not necessarily want to do. In that sense, of course, it is not unique to Russia. According to one recent historic article in the periodical “Vlast” Russia has a very long tradition of such resistance, dating back to the sixteenth century when conscription was first introduced for members of the nobility. (10) In today’s Russia, however, the problem (from the military’s perspective) is particularly acute because the goal of the state – the maintenance of a first-rate military – is so incompatible with what society is capable of, and willing to, provide. In this situation the military can do one of two things: either try to increase society’s ability to provide recruits, or limit its ambitions and settle on a force size that can be maintained effectively. In the sixteenth century, the maintenance of a sufficient reserve was critical due to the constant threats of invasion and rebellion faced by the new Russian state. In the twenty-first century, however, there are no longer Mongol hordes, or hostile Poles and Swedes to contend with; internal disorder is dealt with mainly by MVD forces, and Russia’s foreign military bases, such as those in Tajikistan and Trans-Dniestr, all have relatively small forces – the largest contingent, the one in Tajikistan, numbers
only one division. It seems, then, that the maintenance of a large standing military has more to do with status and image than actual need. If that is the case, then reducing the military’s size may be a far more practical solution in the short run, at least while the longer-term problems are being addressed.

Source Notes:
(1) RIA Novosti, 01 Oct 07 via http://rian.ru/defense_safety/army_navy/20071001/81728370.html
(2) See the ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII Number 11 (12 Apr 07): “Personnel Reform: a Misguided Effort” by Monty Perry.
(3) RIA Novosti, 29 Sep 07 via http://rian.ru/defense_safety/20070929/81597231.html.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.
(7) RIA Novosti, 01 Oct 07 via http://rian.ru/defense_safety/army_navy/20071001/81728370.html
(8) Ibid.
(11) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces (External)

By Lt. Col. Carol Northrup

Missile defense in Europe: No solution in sight
Nearly nine months after Washington officially announced plans to establish a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) system in Europe, Russia and the US do not appear to be any closer to agreement on the issue. The US insists that the system’s sole purpose is to address potential ballistic missile threats from the Middle East. (1) Russia, on the other hand, maintains the system’s real intent is to negate Russian strategic forces (2) and to enable the US to spy on Russia. (3) Two rounds of talks purportedly aimed at finding common ground so far have failed to narrow this gap.

In early 2007, Washington disclosed its intention to place a BMD radar facility in the Czech Republic and to deploy associated anti-missile systems in Poland. The American government has emphasized that its intent is to address emerging threats from the Middle East, specifically Iran, who the US fears could develop a missile capable of reaching American soil by 2015. (4) Assistant Secretary of State John Rood said in an interview last week that a BMD system in Europe not only makes it less tempting for Iran to launch a first strike, but also dissuades the US from believing it must launch a pre-emptive strike against Iran. (5)

Initially, Russia claimed that there was no significant ballistic missile threat to Europe, (6) and then publicly tested missile systems of its own that it claims can evade the proposed BMD network. (7) In June, Vladimir Putin suggested that the US and Russia could share the Gabala early warning radar facility in Azerbaijan in order to jointly defend Europe against potential ballistic missiles from Iran. (8) US officials toured the facility earlier this month and although the US officially has not ruled out using the facility, delegation head Brig. Gen. Patrick O’Reilly, deputy director of the US Missile Defense Agency, indicated that the equipment at Gabala is out-of-date and unlikely to be compatible with the US anti-missile system. (9) US officials have invited Russia to link the system at Gabala into the proposed network in Europe, running them in tandem and providing redundant coverage, (10) but Russia has refused, insisting that the use of Gabala must be a
substitute for, rather than an addition to, the proposed radar system in the Czech Republic (11).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov suggested in a 21 September interview that the US wants to install the system to spy on Russia: “When our American partners say that Gabala cannot be an alternative to a radar in the Czech Republic, I understand them, because the Gabala radar cannot see Russian territory from its western borders to the Urals … A radar in the Czech Republic can.” (12) Russia also warns that building a missile defense system will spark a new arms race as Russia will be forced to respond with “symmetric and asymmetric” measures. (13)

In addition to offering up Gabala, Russia has made other moves to convince the US to reconsider its BMD strategy. In July, Russian leaders warned that if the Bush administration pushed ahead with its plans they would respond by openly deploying Russia’s new Iskander intermediate-range ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad Oblast’. (14) Located along the Baltic Sea, Kaliningrad is Russia’s westernmost outpost, located 200 miles from Russia proper and sharing borders with Lithuania and Poland. Placing ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad, therefore, not only physically threatens any planned BMD installation in Poland, (15) it carries strong symbolic significance, as well.

Russia also is using the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty in order to gain leverage in the situation. At a parliamentary hearing on 19 September, the Duma expressed “predictable and strong support” for a bill put forth by the Kremlin that would freeze Russia’s compliance with the treaty. (16) Russian threats for a moratorium on CFE participation are not new – Russia has threatened to suspend its participation several times, due, it claimed, to NATO members’ failure to ratify the treaty’s 1999 amendments. In July, however, Putin linked a moratorium to the US missile defense plan. (17) The moratorium—set to go into effect at midnight on 12 December of this year—would not amount to a
full-scale withdrawal from the treaty, but would mean that Russia no longer would allow conventional arms inspections or share information on its deployments. (18)

The issue has become a high-priority concern raised repeatedly in direct talks between Putin and Bush. Foreign and defense ministers of both countries are set to meet and discuss the issue 12 October. (19) Russian and US officials publicly have expressed optimism that the talks will yield a workable solution, but at this point there seems to be little ground that either party is willing or able to cede.

Source Notes:
(3) “US ABM in Europe is a Threat – Lavrov,” ITAR TASS, 21 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Ibid.
(8) Ibid.
(15) Ibid.
(18) Ibid.

The thoughts and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the United States government.

**Russian Federation: Foreign Relations**

By Melissa McGann

**G8 revisits Iran sanctions, gulf persists**

At a G8 meeting on Wednesday, September 26, tensions escalated between six of the members over Iran’s continued enrichment of uranium, suspected to be used in the development of undisclosed nuclear weapons. The meeting called for the introduction of tougher sanctions against Iran, following an address earlier in the week by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the United Nations
General Assembly, during which he claimed that the “nuclear issue of Iran is closed,” and that he would defy any additional sanctions imposed on Iran. (1) The United States, Britain and France pushed for swift, intensified sanctions against Iran, while Russia and China opposed additional sanctions, preferring to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to continue its inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities before considering sanctions. (2) Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov exchanged harsh criticisms during Wednesday’s meeting regarding the new sanctions proposal, leaving the six Foreign Ministers unable to reach an agreement. (3) By the end of the week, despite the US stated intention to increase multilateral pressure with tougher sanctions on Iran, the G8 meeting’s members ceded to Russian demands to extend the timeline until November for Iran to “show a positive outcome of their efforts” (4) based on a report from the IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei. (5)

Iran’s earlier disregard for Security Council Resolution 1737, which called for an end to all uranium enrichment programs led in March 2007, to the United Nations Security Council’s March 2007 decision to intensify sanctions through Resolution 1747 by blocking the import or export of nuclear matériel, the export of arms, and the freezing of financial assets of persons or entities supporting nuclear activities. (6) An increasingly isolated Iran rejected the United Nations Resolutions and stated that it would continue the enrichment of uranium, which it continues to claim is for peaceful purposes. (7)

The failure to reach agreement on an Iranian sanctions strategy at the recent G8 meeting further demonstrates the divide between the West and Russia. (8) The US and EU claim that Iran is enriching uranium in support of a secret nuclear weapons program, which they see as a threat to stability in the region. There also are doubts in the West regarding the effectiveness of the current IAEA inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities. The US and EU are concerned that the inspections will be ineffective and drawn-out, allowing Iran to continue its
disregard of previous UN resolutions. (8) Recent comments by ElBaradei appear to be pro-Iranian, and are increasing the skepticism among some G8 members about the objectivity of his report, due in mid-November. (9) The Bush administration’s and EU’s patience for Iran’s continued uranium enrichment program is waning and, in the meantime, the West is rallying for unilateral economic sanctions against Iran.

Though Russia has supported the first two sets of sanctions against Iran, it is voicing opposition to a third, tougher set of sanctions. Russia’s Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, is backing the IAEA inspections to go forward in cooperation with Iran, providing a final opportunity to fulfill the requirements set forth in UN Resolution 1747. (10) As reported by Kommersant, Lavrov sees American and European intervention in the IAEA inspections as counterproductive and unjustified. (11) Lavrov told reporters that the newly proposed sanctions against Iran are an invention "by the Americans and the French, not us." (12) From the Russian perspective, this American-led initiative, for which Congress has approved additional sanctions against Iran this week, undermines the legitimacy of the UN Security Council decision and a successful resolution to this issue. Russia has resisted intense pressure from the West in a clear sign that it is willing to shield Iran, or at least buy a little extra time for Iran to reveal its nuclear intentions.

China and Russia do not claim to support a nuclear Iran, but both countries have significant political and economic ties with Iran. It is estimated that between 2001 and 2005 Russia and Iran concluded $1.7 million in arms transfer agreements. (13) Russia also is engaged heavily in energy plans with Iran, specifically with the Bushehr nuclear power plant, completed construction of which has been delayed to 2008, reportedly due to Iran’s debt on the project. (14) These economic agreements have factored into the drive by Russia to continue diplomatic negotiations with Iran to disclose the purpose of its uranium enrichment program. Russia also might be taking into consideration the
possibility of American led military action against Iran, which would cause further
instability in Russia’s relations in the region. Although it is predicted that Russia
eventually will side with the West, if Iran fails the IAEA inspections, perhaps
Russia’s attempt to shield Iran in the face of intense pressure by the West is
enough to convince Iran that Russia remains an ally and to ensure the
continuation of its economic relations.

Source Notes:
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(5) The Associated Press, 29 Sep 07,
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Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Robyn Angley

GEORGIA
Former Defense Minister announces opposition, is arrested
Irakli Okruashvili, who has headed the Interior Ministry and, most recently, the Defense Ministry, was arrested on 27 September after a spectacular press conference and subsequent press junket several days earlier, during which he announced the formation of his own opposition party. In announcing his move into opposition, Okruashvili accused President Mikheil Saakashvili of having employed murder as a “common practice” and of covering up evidence related to the death of former Prime Minister and potential rival Zurab Zhvania. (1) Okruashvili’s disclosures have set off domestic political upheaval in Tbilisi at a time when Saakashvili is increasing his efforts to attract international attention to
and, presumably, Western diplomatic pressure against, Russian interference in Georgian affairs. (2)

Okruashvili was born in Tskhinvali, the capital of the separatist region of South Ossetia, and he is a lawyer by training. He also is a member of the Georgia Young Lawyers Association, a civil society group that has been active in promoting legal reform. Okruashvili worked as Deputy Justice Minister when Saakashvili headed the Justice Ministry. In 2002, he became a member of the Tbilisi City Council. Following the Rose Revolution, Okruashvili held a number of posts in the Saakashvili-led government, including Prosecutor General, Interior Minister, and Defense Minister. Okruashvili supervised the famous purging of the Georgian police corps that demonstrated, according to the Saakashvili administration, the new regime’s commitment to reducing corruption. Okruashvili was shuffled from the position of Defense Minister to Economics Minister in November 2006; Saakashvili claimed the move was indicative of the shift in the “front lines” of his concern from the military to the economy. This reasoning seemed plausible given the Russian economic embargo on Georgian goods imposed last September following Georgia’s arrest of four active Russian military intelligence officers. (3) Okruashvili appeared to have conceded to the transfer at the time, only to resign within a week, citing a desire to pursue academic studies and promising a return to the army at some point in the future. As a public figure, Okruashvili drew broad support; a 22 May 06 poll found him to be the most popular of the politicians surrounding Saakashvili. (4)

Following his resignation, Okruashvili maintained a relatively low profile, though Georgian media outlets were rife with speculation about his return to Georgian politics. Things began to heat up in mid-September when officials were arrested on charges of misappropriation of funds and embezzlement in Gori, which is located in Okruashvili’s home region of Shida Kartli. (5) A week and a half later, on 23 September, Mikhail Kareli, the erstwhile governor of Shida Kartli and a well-known Okruashvili protégé, was arrested for corruption. (6) There had been
open speculation about the creation of a new opposition party and Okruashvili’s participation in it; the obvious targeting of his supporters may have been a scheme on the government’s part to draw Okruashvili into the open.

After nearly a year of relative silence, Okruashvili announced on 25 September the formation of a new political party, “Movement for Unified Georgia.” However, Okruashvili’s first major public statements since his resignation did not concern only the new party; the former Defense Minister also made significant allegations against his former ally, Saakashvili. Okruashvili claimed that the Saakashvili government’s vaunted corruption campaigns, in which he played a significant role, were an illusion, and targeted only the poor. (7) He also alleged that Saakashvili’s uncle, Temur Alasani, had been detained on corruption charges but was released upon intervention by the President. (8)

With regard to South Ossetia, which Okruashvili had promised to bring back into the fold, the former Defense Minister accused Saakashvili of having squandered the opportunity to bring the region to heel because he lacked the political courage to demand that Russian peacekeepers leave Georgian territory. Instead, Saakashvili established an alternative South Ossetian government headed by Dmitri Sanakoyev, whom Okruashvili denounced as a caricature lacking authority with the South Ossetian people. (9)

Most damning, however, were the comments Okruashvili delivered during media appearances following his announcement. He stated that Saakashvili had given him orders to eliminate businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili and also alleged that evidence regarding the death of former Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania had been fabricated. (10) The two allegations go hand in hand, since both hint at the possible involvement of the Georgian President in murder.

Zurab Zhvania was the third member of the triumvirate that led the Rose Revolution; the other two leaders were Saakashvili and Speaker of the
Parliament Nino Burdjanadze. It was Zhvania who was responsible for Saakashvili’s return to Georgia and his entrance into politics under Shevardnadze’s Citizens’ Union of Georgia party. Although the least charismatic of the three leaders, Zhvania’s managerial skills, steady personality, and political network made him an anchor and a stabilizing force in the new regime after Shevardnadze’s resignation. While serving as Prime Minister in the post-Rose Revolution government, Zhvania died suddenly in February 2005. His death was attributed to carbon monoxide poisoning; he and Raul Usupov were found dead in the latter’s home on 3 February 2005. Usupov was slated to become deputy governor of the Kvemo Kartli region. (He had previously worked for Zurab Melikishvili, governor of the Kvemo Kartli region, when Melikishvili was at the Chancellery. He had also worked under Zinaida Bestaeva, minister of state for ethnic minorities and civil integration, as an adviser on integration issues.) Zhvania’s death officially was pronounced an accident, although his relatives have questioned that conclusion. Okruashvili’s accusations reopen the case of the death of a man who was perhaps the only real threat to Saakashvili’s consolidation of power in the domestic political scene.

At the time of Okruashvili’s announcement, Saakashvili was in New York, preparing for an appearance at the United Nations. He did not comment on the allegations until 29 September, when he denied the charges. (11) The delay is worth noting. Perhaps Saakashvili did not want to spoil his appearance in front of an international audience by acknowledging Okruashvili’s claims. Perhaps his involvement in the events mentioned in Okruashvili’s allegations caused him to hesitate before making a public statement. The silence also could be due to personnel issues: Saakashvili’s spokesman, Dimitri Kitoshvili, was arrested on extortion charges just hours before Okruashvili’s speech; Kitoshvili had close ties to Okruashvili. (12) [The spokesman was released on 28 September after testifying against Okruashvili. (13)] Regardless of the veracity of Okruashvili’s claims, the fact remains that the Georgian government’s actions spoke more
loudly than Saakashvili did. On 27 September, Okruashvili was arrested on charges of extortion, money laundering, negligence and abuse of office. (14)

The movement against Okruashvili is not new; investigations into Okruashvili’s affairs as Defense Minister were reported as early as February, when the General Inspector began investigating military spending for the 2005-2006 period, during which 103 million lari supposedly disappeared from the ministry’s coffers. (15) However, his arrest, coming as it did on the heels of his move into the opposition, certainly invites suspicions that it is, as he claims, politically motivated.

Okruashvili’s arrest sparked the largest protests to occur in Georgia since the Rose Revolution, drawing a crowd of several thousand in Tbilisi on 28 September. (16) In the meantime, several questions regarding Okruashvili’s past, and its possible effect on the present, remain. First, what prompted his resignation from his new position as Economics Minister, after he already had agreed to accept it and the transfer had been announced publicly? Saakashvili appointed him at a time when the economy was desperately important, in light of the Russian embargo. Okruashvili previously had demonstrated himself to be loyal, serving in whatever capacity the president selected for him. Why choose that moment for departure?

The second key question also concerns timing. Why did Okruashvili choose this moment to make his allegations against Saakashvili public? Were the attacks on his supporters a motivating force or perhaps a pre-emptive strike by the president? Okruashvili has yet to produce evidence to support his claims against Saakashvili, a task presumably made more difficult by his incarceration.

Saakashvili’s treatment of his political rival will be a decisive indicator of his commitment to democratic reform. From that perspective, Okruashvili’s arrest is,
at best, poor timing. At worst, it seems to confirm his allegations about the man who currently is the country's strongest political force.

Source Notes:
(1) "Irakli Okruashvili’s Speech at Presentation of his Party," Civil Georgia, 25 Sep 07 via http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=15862.
(2) Saakashvili spoke at the United Nations on 27 September, seven days after Georgian Interior Ministry troops killed two Russian officers in the disputed separatist republic of Abkhazia. (See “Remarks by H.E. Mikheil Saakashvili at the 62nd Session of the United Nations,” 27 Sep 07 via http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=3&st=0&id=2345.) Russia claimed the officers were conducting anti-terrorist training for the Abkhaz separatists. (See Lily Hindy, “Georgia and Russia clash at U.N. over shootings of Russian military officials,” Associated Press, 27 Sep 07 via Georgia News Digest, 28 Sep 07.)
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(13) “Ex-spokesman released after testifying against Okruashvili,” Civil Georgia, 28 Sep 07 via Georgia News Digest, 29 Sep 07.
(14) “Officials charges brought against Georgia's ex-defence minister,” Kavkas-Press, 28 Sep 07, OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.
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Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

KYRGYZSTAN
Kyrgyz constitutional referendum: New chance for political reconciliation?
With the changing of the seasons, a new chapter has opened in Kyrgyzstan's tumultuous political scene, one that offers at least the faint hope of stability and a more harmonious relationship between the executive and the legislature, although this harmony may come at a high cost. On 21 October, Kyrgyz voters will head to the polls to cast their ballots for or against constitutional amendments that would grant the president significantly enhanced powers and substantially change the electoral code, (1) including increasing the number of legislative seats. (2) Should voters approve the latest draft of the amendments, it appears almost certain that new parliamentary elections will be necessary, in order to satisfy the requirements of the country's modified electoral system.
President Kurmanbek Bakiev’s decision to hold a referendum came in the wake of the Constitutional Court’s ruling that the Kyrgyz parliament twice violated constitutional procedure last fall, when deputies voted to revise the constitution in November, and then revoked most of those revisions a month later. The court found that both sets of constitutional amendments were invalid, (3) because all constitutional changes must first be reviewed and approved by the court, and then either passed by a parliamentary majority or by popular referendum (requiring a minimum of 300,000 votes). Pts. 1-3 in Article 36 of Kyrgyzstan’s constitution stipulate:

“1. Changes and amendments to this Constitution shall be adopted by a referendum called by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic. 
2. [Constitutional] changes and amendments may be adopted by the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic on the initiation of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, of a majority of the whole number of the deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, or of no fewer than 300,000 voters. 
3. In considering a proposal to change or amend the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic shall take into account an opinion of the Constitutional Court of the Kyrgyz Republic [on the proposal], and such proposal shall be considered no earlier than in three months, but prior to the expiration of six months dating from the submission of the proposal to the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic.” (4)

However, the Constitutional Court was never given the opportunity to review either version of the 2006 amendments, thereby making them null and void.

Last year’s rush to finally implement constitutional reform and thereby transfer a number of powers from the executive to the legislature came after months of demonstrations by opposition groups and their supporters, who were frustrated by President Bakiev’s slow pace in fulfilling his campaign promises. One of the opposition’s main charges against former President Askar Akaev had been that,
in his hands, the executive exercised far too much power, resulting in a high degree of government corruption and allowing the Akaev family and its cronies to amass substantial personal wealth. President Bakiev’s administration pledged to institute political reforms, which would ensure greater government transparency and accountability and combat corruption. Unfortunately, once in office, the president seemed reluctant to undertake any political reforms, resulting in months of renewed protest demonstrations by opposition and other civic groups that culminated in the passage of the fall 2006 constitutional amendments.

Although the Constitutional Court’s ruling nullifies the progress that was made last fall, it also offers Kyrgyzstan’s political leaders one more opportunity to bridge at least a few of their differences, as well as the chance to reengage an increasingly apathetic public in the debate on political reform. However, it appears as though this opportunity also may be about to be squandered. Shortly after the court’s ruling, parliament held an emergency meeting, at which the deputies passed a vote of no confidence in the Constitutional Court, and, by unanimous vote, ordered the president to appoint new judges to the court within two weeks. (5) Several days later, MPs approved a resolution requesting that President Bakiev postpone the 21 October referendum, (6) asked Bakiev to investigate the full range of the court’s activities and authorized the Audit Chamber to examine the court’s financial affairs. MPs believe that the court exceeded the limits of its authority with regard to its decisions on “the illegal referenda of 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2003” and by permitting former President Askar Akaev to stand for a third term. Azimbek Beknazarov, chair of a newly formed state commission charged with investigating the Constitutional Court judges’ activities, went so far as to state: “As a result of the actions of the Constitutional Court, there have been several coups in the country.” (7)

Although the parliament’s recent actions may represent nothing more than the deputies’ knee-jerk reaction to the prospect of losing their seats in a new election, should the referendum result in the amendments’ passage into law, the
potential repercussions of these actions could precipitate yet another political crisis, possibly the most severe one since Akaev was ousted. The MPs refusal to accept the court’s authority puts them on a collision course with both the executive and judiciary branches of government, as well as demonstrating their utter disregard for the laws of their own constitution; President Bakiev finally may have legitimate cause to dissolve parliament, a cause provided by parliament’s own demonstrably unlawful actions.

On the other hand, should the referendum go forward as planned on 21 October and should the amendments become law, the result could be a greatly strengthened executive ruling over a one-party state. The latest version of the constitutional amendments increases the number of parliamentary seats from 75 to 90 (as did the 2006 amendments), but also changes the electoral system to one based entirely on party lists, as opposed to the combined single mandate and party list system proposed in 2006. Should one party succeed in capturing more than 45 seats (according to the 2006 amendments, a parliamentary majority would have required only a majority of the seats elected by proportional representation, i.e. 23 seats), it will have the right to nominate a prime minister, who, in turn, will nominate the cabinet. However, it is up to the president to approve or reject all of these nominees. The new amendments also will grant the president the authority to appoint all of the members of the National Security Council and all local judges and he will have the right to nominate Constitutional Court and Supreme Court judges, the prosecutor general, the head of the National Bank chief and the Central Election Committee chairperson. The president would be able to dismiss the high court judges only with parliament’s acquiescence, but he could dismiss local judges, the prime minister, cabinet members, the prosecutor general, and the National Bank and Central Election Committee chairs without consulting parliament. (8) This provision essentially would make the top government appointees personally beholden to the president.
There is also the fear that Bakiev either will create or publicly support a party in the next parliamentary elections, which could result in one party dominating the legislature and transforming Kyrgyzstan’s legislature into little more than a rubber stamp. The president initially suggested establishing his own party in his annual address to the nation on 19 September: “…I myself decided to set up and support a new political force - a party of creation, a party of responsibility and a party of action. Relying on it, I intend to ensure the fulfillment of those tasks which are outlined in our strategy and ensure that Kyrgyzstan joins the ranks of developed democratic countries where people get average income.” (9)

However, one week later, the president told reporters: “I, as the head of state, must treat equally all the political parties. Therefore, I cannot and have no right to be the leader of any of them. It is a different matter that I would like to support a party which proves to be responsible, active and effective and which will promote the country’s policy.” (10)

Whether Bakiev actually goes so far as to create his own party (an act that would be illegal, but who’s counting?) or simply “supports” a party, the result likely will be the same: a landslide victory for a political faction that has the president’s personal stamp of approval and which therefore will do his bidding in parliament. Alternatively, if the current parliament continues to ignore the mandates of the constitution and further obstructs holding of the referendum, Bakiev may dismiss the legislature – either way, it seems almost certain that the president will prevail and that Kyrgyzstan’s population faces rough times ahead.

Source Notes:
(1) “Kyrgyzstan’s president calls referendum on changing constitution,” 19 Sep 07, Associated Press via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(2) “Constitution May Result in Pliable Judiciary,” 26 Sep 07, News Briefing Central Asia via Institute for War and Peace Reporting
UKRAINE

Orange revival or more of the same?
On Wednesday, Ukraine faced the possibility of continuing political stagnation, after President Viktor Yushchenko encouraged lengthy negotiations to form a government on the heels of the country’s parliamentary elections. If this occurs, in the short term, this scenario could doom Ukraine’s WTO aspirations. In the long term, it likely will increase the cynicism and apathy that has begun to infect Ukraine’s voters.
Sunday’s parliamentary elections gave the country’s two so-called “orange” parties—based on their leadership during the orange revolution—a slim majority of seats. The bloc of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko (BYUT) drastically increased its support to over 30%, while President Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defense Bloc (OU-PSD) remained level in third place at about 14%. When the seats of parties that did not pass the threshold to enter parliament are redistributed, these blocs will control about 51% of the parliament.

These results give the blocs the power to form a government immediately following official publication of the vote tally. Ukraine’s parliament chooses both the government and prime minister, and prior to the election, both political forces supported the likely candidacy of Yulia Tymoshenko for that post, should they succeed in the poll. The result is a remarkable comeback for the orange forces, which have been mired in opposition for a year, largely thanks to the unwillingness of Yushchenko to work closely with Tymoshenko.

During his presidency, Yushchenko has been unable to consolidate power. He began battling for popularity with Tymoshenko almost from the moment he appointed her prime minister following the orange revolution. When he suddenly dismissed Tymoshenko just nine months after appointing her—chiding her for not being a “team player”—his support plummeted. He then turned to his former opponent Viktor Yanukovych, who was approved as prime minister in the name of “unity.” Because the president and prime minister never agreed on basic issues of reform, the country was treated to the sight of their top two politicians continually attacking one another. Reforms stalled, inflation skyrocketed and the deficit increased. By 2007, Yushchenko’s approval ratings had plummeted to below 20%. In contrast, Tymoshenko’s popularity has never been higher.

It was not surprising, then, that Yushchenko embraced Tymoshenko during the campaign. Before the election, Yushchenko met with Tymoshenko several
times, and the two were said to have agreed on mechanisms to ensure that they and their forces could work productively together in government. OU-PSD went so far as to include video of Yushchenko and Tymoshenko embracing in its final campaign ad, as Yushchenko was shown discussing the cooperation of OU-PSD with BYUT.

But in a televised address on Wednesday, Yushchenko appeared to contradict this cooperation, when he urged the two orange parties, plus the party of current Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, to begin negotiations to form a majority. “I have held political consultations with the political winners over the past two days and today I commission the Party of Regions, BYUT, Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defense and the other winners to start preliminary political consultations to form a majority in Ukraine’s parliament and form a Ukrainian government,” he said. Moreover, “We will have true political stability when the three key players – the Party of Regions, BYuT and Our Ukraine – make compromises,” he said. “So my key message to these political forces is that they must start political talks to formulate basic rules of forming a majority in Ukraine’s parliament and Ukraine’s government and building relations between those political forces that represent government and opposition.” (1) Later, Yushchenko went further when he suggested that the renewed orange coalition “will not bring stability to the state,” and that OU-PSD and BYUT should offer Yanukovych and his allies key cabinet positions. (2)

The statement shocked most within both the OU-PSD bloc and the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, who reportedly were expecting the president to endorse the promised “democratic coalition” in his remarks.

Yushchenko’s statement asking for negotiations with the Party of Regions (PoR) is particularly surprising, given his recent criticism of both the party and Yanukovych for what he called “a policy of intrigues and betrayals disguised as national unity slogans.”(3) In fact, Yushchenko dismissed the previous
parliament led by PoR, based on statements by Party of Regions representatives that they would soon attempt to impeach the president and change the constitution to remove the institution altogether. Ukrainian media at the time carried almost daily reports of money changing hands in an attempt to “convince” parliamentarians to support such a move. Yushchenko himself accused PoR of bribery. Furthermore, during the election, Yushchenko implied that slow vote counts from PoR strongholds could be the result of attempts at fraud. These accusations apparently are forgotten.

Almost immediately after the president’s call for tri-party negotiations, Yulia Tymoshenko reconfirmed her bloc’s position that it would not negotiate with the Party of Regions, which she calls the “party of criminals.” Should the president’s party agree to form a government with Yanukovych, BYUT would move into opposition, she stated. Leading an opposition force, she said, would be more beneficial to the country than “providing cover for a mafia.” (4)

This reaction was expected, given Tymoshenko’s unwavering criticism of Yanukovych. The reaction of Yushchenko’s own bloc, however, may have surprised him.

At a press conference Thursday afternoon, Yuriy Lutsenko, who tops the OU-PSD parliamentary list, entirely rejected the idea of negotiating with PoR over a majority government. This would go “against the will of the voters,” and “against our campaign promises,” he said. (5)

Lutsenko announced that discussions would begin within 24 hours on the final points of forming a majority. He also suggested that OU-PSD and BYUT would invite the bloc of former parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn to take part in negotiations. Tymoshenko earlier stated that she had “no objection” to working with Lytvyn and reportedly met with him on Thursday.
Lytvyn’s bloc won just under 4% of the vote and would provide significant padding on the majority. However, his allegiances are unknown, and he generally is seen as being close to both Yanukovych and former president Leonid Kuchma. Nevertheless, Tymoshenko and Lutsenko both suggested the possibility that members of their own blocs could be enticed to desert them, thus making the addition of a third party to the coalition necessary. Tymoshenko claimed her deputies already had been contacted by representatives of PoR, suggesting that the practice of bribery and intimidation for votes is continuing in Ukraine.

Overall, it seems that Yushchenko’s call for broad negotiations largely will be ignored, perhaps signaling an even further fall in his political status. The situation is unexpected, since it had seemed that the victory of the orange forces was not only a victory for Tymoshenko, but also a chance for Yushchenko to embrace once again the ideals of his primary supporters and perhaps increase his electoral support.

Lutsenko claimed at his press conference that the president’s words had been misinterpreted and that he remained committed to a “democratic coalition.” The president himself has not commented, however.

The coalition between Lutsenko and Tymoshenko appears firm; Lutsenko arrived at the BYUT election-night celebration with a large bouquet of flowers for the former prime minister, grandly kissed her hand and confirmed his support for her proposed premiership. His press conference today should further solidify their coalition.

There are, of course, individuals within Yuschenko’s bloc who would rather work with Yanukovych, based on joint business projects or other professional ties. For now, however, the bloc very publicly has rebuffed the president’s suggestions and reaffirmed its support for a new orange coalition.