1998-10-07

The ISCIP Analyst, Volume III, Issue 14

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/11909

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PRESIDENT

Strikes aim at ouster of president

Building on resentment over wage arrears and the fiscal meltdown of recent months, organizers of nationwide strikes slated for 7 October attempted to focus anger on President Yeltsin. Gennadi Zyuganov, who was instrumental in the selection of the new prime minister, denounced previous government officials and targeted Yeltsin in his address "To The Working People" on the eve of the strikes:

"Gaidar stole your savings; Chubais stole your property; Chernomyrdin stole your pay. (...) Yeltsin is an obstacle in everyone's way, and won't allow either you or the government or the parliament to work." (Sovetskaya Rossiya, 6 Oct 98; FBIS-SOV-98-278)

Presidential preparations for the rallies included meetings with the heads of the power ministries and plans to quell large disturbances, however early reports suggest that attendance at the strikes and rallies will fall well below the anticipated 20 million or more participants, numbering instead in the hundreds of thousands. (BBC World Service, 7 Oct 98)

'He doesn't understand'

Part of the nearly inevitable fallout of an acrimonious dismissal of employees, such as occurred with the fall of the Kirienko government, is the reflex to disparage the former boss. In this case, the disgruntled employee is former Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov, once touted as a presidential favorite and
potential successor, and he has let loose scathing criticism of the president in an interview with The Washington Post.(29 Sept 98; nexis)

Nemtsov describes strong initial support from the president, but, confirming what we have long surmised, the president's health interfered with his ability to govern effectively: "He was very weak, he was not ready to struggle."

As Nemtsov's attempts to implement reforms were frustrated in the Chernomyrdin government, he sought assistance from the president, who offered little more than encouragement. Nemtsov claims, "He didn't understand it. (...) He thought it was just intrigue. He always understands power as just personnel decisions. He doesn't understand; it wasn't just intrigue."

When Yel'tsin finally did dismiss Chernomyrdin, it was not, as was claimed at the time, an attempt to reinvigorate the reform process, but rather arose from Yel'tsin's fear "of (losing) his power," according to Nemtsov.

The substance of Nemtsov's remarks are not particularly startling as it has been clear since the beginning of Yel'tsin's presidency that his strength lay not in his grasp of policy issues, but in his sense of political timing. What is remarkable is that Yel'tsin's political sense so failed him.

GOVERNMENT

Chernomyrdin targets Zyuganov

Clearly bitter from his unsuccessful confirmation campaign, former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin has withdrawn from an election for a Duma seat claiming, "...I do not want to work in that Duma after what has happened!" (Komsomol'skaya pravda, 26 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-271)

When asked to explain who was behind the intrigues that prevented his regaining the premiership, Chernomyrdin answered simply, "Zyuganov." Describing a
conversation with Zyuganov, Chernomyrdin says that Zyuganov announced that Luzhkov was the Communists' candidate and that they planned to form a "left-centrist" government. While Chernomyrdin has often been cited as an able reconciler of diverse political approaches and capable of working both with radical economic reformers as well as the Communist and nationalist Duma factions, this recent battle has elicited an uncharacteristically caustic remark aimed at Zyuganov and his party: "The leftists are grave diggers and are trouble for Russia. The whole world has purged itself but we continue to suffer this trouble."

**Government staffing limps forward**

Prime Minister Primakov surely has a tough sell in recruiting personnel to his new government: (the ruble is worthless, hyperinflation is likely, winter is coming and the harvest looks bad...), but no finer point could be put on the issue than the slow process of finding willing ministers and officials. The most current roster of appointees is as follows:

vacant: antimonopoly policies, nuclear energy, state property, health, culture, secondary and vocational occupation, natural resources, regional policies, agriculture and food labour, and social development. (ITAR-TASS, 1209 GMT, 25 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-268)

[**] With the appointment of Mikhail Zadornov as finance minister, Aleksandr Shokhin (who was under the impression that he would be in charge of finance) resigned, calling the Zadornov appointment "a political mistake." (Interfax, 1518 GMT, 25 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-268)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By John McDonough and Sarah Miller

Despite US dissatisfaction, Seleznev calls for expanding links with Iran
Either in spite of or because of US opposition, Russia continues to strengthen its relationship with Iran, building a strategic alliance with the Islamic Republic. From 20-23 September, Russian State Duma Chairman Gennadi Seleznev ignored US dissatisfaction by further strengthening Russian-Iranian relations during an official visit to Iran. During the three-day visit he stressed the need to expand Russia's partnership with Iran in the economic and cultural spheres despite the fact that "the United States is still sharply criticizing Iran and calling it a country of terrorists." Seleznev led a parliamentary delegation that held high-level meetings with Iranian first vice-president Hassan Habibi, parliament speaker Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, and Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'. Following the official visit Seleznev told a news conference in Moscow on 24 September that he and Iranian senior officials "reached total mutual understanding" on the need to step up Russian-Iranian cooperation, emphasizing that Russia will complete the construction of a nuclear power station in Iran "in spite of the US dissatisfaction." Seleznev not only was outspoken on cultural and economic ties with Iran, but he also stressed that
Russia will continue to sell arms to Iran. "Iran is a reliable partner of Russia," he said. (IRNA, 1557 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-NES-98-265, and Interfax, 1336 GMT, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-267)

Seleznev also used the visit to highlight Russia's support for Iran's stance against the Taliban which Iran has accused of killing Iranian citizens in Afghanistan. During his meeting with Expediency Council Chairman [Akbar] Hashemi-Rafsanjani, the Duma chairman expressed deep regret over the inhumane actions by the Taliban in Afghanistan and said that the current situation in Afghanistan goes against all international norms and principles. He added that Russia shares Iran's view that a coalition government comprising all groups should come to power in Afghanistan. Seleznev also stated his support for Iran's action to deploy forces and stage exercises along the country's western borders aimed at preventing the spread of insecurity and drug smuggling in border regions. Speaking to the official Iranian news agency, he added that, due to the presence of the Russian border guards at the Afghan frontiers of Tajikistan, "the Taliban don't also dare to violate the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States." (Television First Program Network, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-NES-98-265, and IRNA, 1321 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-NES-98-265)

Although Russia has repeatedly denied providing military support to anti-Taliban forces fighting for control of Afghanistan, Moscow has consistently supported Iran's anti-Taliban position, especially following the reported deaths of Iranian citizens at the hands of the Taliban forces in central Afghanistan. It is unlikely that Moscow would provide overt military support to Iran in the event of an Iranian-Taliban war, however, Iran could expect an infusion of weapons and supplies from Moscow in the event of a war with the Taliban.

**New foreign minister hits the ground running**
Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov spent nearly a week in the United States attending the 53rd session of the United Nations General Assembly and
conducting ministerial and bilateral meetings in both New York and Washington. Ivanov’s first trip to the United States as foreign minister came less than 10 days after assuming his new role in Primakov’s government. During Ivanov’s trip to New York, the 53-year-old career diplomat addressed the United Nations General Assembly where he stressed the principle that the force of the law takes precedence in world politics over the right to use force. Although he did not specifically refer to NATO proposals to use force against Serbian forces in Kosovo during his speech to the UN, he took numerous opportunities during his visit to stress Moscow’s opposition to any outside use of force in Kosovo. (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 25 Sep 98, weekend edition, p. 2; FBIS-SOV-98-268, and ITAR-TASS, 0239 GMT, 20 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-263)

In addition to a ministerial meeting with the G-7 group of ministers, Ivanov met with Iraq's Foreign Minister Muhammad Sa'id al-Sahhaf. The two foreign ministers discussed topics related to Iraq's relationship with the Security Council. Sources of the Iraqi delegation to the UN General Assembly's session told an Iraqi news correspondent in New York that the meeting was very positive and that Ivanov expressed Russia's understanding of Iraq's demand to close the weapons files as soon as possible (INA, 0920 GMT, 23 Sep 98; FBIS-NES-98-266) – a position that Russia has repeatedly supported during Security Council sessions.

In addition to his meetings in New York, Ivanov delivered a personal message from President Yel'tsin to President Clinton. Ivanov said the message expressed "deep satisfaction with the development of bilateral relations between Russia and the United States on principles of equitable partnership." (ITAR-TASS, 0008 GMT, 25 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-268) The message of "equitable partnership" was reinforced by Ivanov during an interview with ITAR-TASS. Ivanov, stressing Russia's nuclear power and responsibility, stated that Russia assumes "special responsibility as a nuclear power, as a great power and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, for maintaining peace and security, and we will
continue to pursue an active, constructive foreign policy." (ITAR-TASS, 1944 GMT, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-267)

**Despite view of experts, further delay on START-II ratification likely**

Colonel Sergei Glotov, one of the leaders of the nonpartisan "anti-NATO" movement of Duma deputies, recently spoke out against ratification of START-II. He said in a 30 September interview that Russia is willing to continue the dialogue on reducing nuclear arsenals, but the country's national interests must be heeded. These latest comments against a speedy ratification followed a series of visits to units of Russia's Strategic Missile Troops by a representative group of Duma deputies. Based on these visits Glotov stated that "in harsh financial circumstances, the country's missile troops continue to carry out their combat duties in an exemplary manner. They are maintaining launchers in tip-top condition and fully ensuring Russia's national security," he said. "We should not hurry to make a final decision on cutting our deterrent." (ITAR-TASS, 1229 GMT, 30 Sep 98; FBIS-UMA-98-273)

These latest anti-START-II comments were issued a day prior to statements made by a group of Russian defense ministry experts in favor of the speedy Duma ratification of the treaty. The defense experts maintain that, given the present situation in Russia, it is very difficult for the country to maintain nuclear parity with the United States in total nuclear potential. The experts noted that in the absence of additional funding, which appears to be unlikely, Russia's nuclear capability by the year 2003, in all three sectors of the nuclear triad will fall far below the levels specified in the START-II treaty. (Interfax, 1 Oct 98; FBIS-TAC-98-274)

**Mixed reactions from Moscow follow Germany's election results**

A Russian foreign ministry statement that was issued following Germany's election results was cautiously optimistic concerning the changing of the guard in Germany's leadership. The statement said that Moscow hopes the new German
government will promote the further consolidation of good-neighborliness, partnership and mutual trust between Russia and Germany. (ITAR-TASS, 1038 GMT, 28 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-271) In a different forum, foreign ministry spokesman Vladimir Rakhmanin, referring to the "expanded format" under which the last Russian-German summit was held in June of this year, said Moscow hopes that this and other forms of close cooperation between Russia and Germany would be continued in the future. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 30 Sep 98)

However, the view from the Duma was a little less optimistic. Vladimir Lukin, chairman of the Duma International Affairs Committee, was quick to state that relations between Russia and Germany will change. In an interview with a Moscow radio station, Lukin stated that "relations in Kohl's day were rather feudal, patriarchal, and conservative" and that in the future he thought that relations between the new Socialist Democratic-led government in Germany and Russia would not have the same "intensity" as before because the new government in Germany will get "bogged down" in domestic affairs. (Radiostantsiya Ekho Moskvy, 1500 GMT, 28 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-271)

**Duma member: Possible Turkish attack on S-300 sites is act of war**

In an interview with Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation that will be broadcasted on 7 October, Aleksei Arbatov, the alternate chairman of the Russian Duma's Defense Committee, said Russia believes that a possible Turkish intervention during the delivery of the S-300 missiles in Cyprus would constitute an act of war against Russia and would be answered militarily. Russia will react with political, not military, means if Turkey attacks the missile sites after the missiles are installed in Cyprus because there is no mutual security treaty or agreement with Cyprus. He said the Russian Duma could ratify such an agreement within one day.
In the interview, Arbatov stressed that safeguarding Cyprus' unity, independence, and territorial integrity is of vital importance to maintain the balance in an area that extends from the Black Sea to Cyprus. (Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation Radio Network, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-WEU-98-267)

**Let the summits begin**

It seems that a series of summits with Asian heads of state just might come to fruition this Fall, barring any major domestic catastrophes. Earlier this year, a Sino-Russian summit was postponed due to flooding in China, while the momentum of Russo-Japanese relations slowed due to government changes in both countries. For the time being, relations with both countries appear to be back on track.

A series of meetings between Russian and Japanese officials are bringing the two countries a step closer to the much anticipated "shirt-sleeves" summit on 11-12 November. (Kyodo, 2349 GMT, 21 Sep 98; FBIS-EAS-98-264) Of note was a particularly fruitful meeting between former Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and President Boris Yeltsin. It was reported that Yeltsin pledged to respond to an as-yet-unreleased Japanese proposal on the Kurile Island issue at the upcoming summit with Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi. Resolution of the issue, the conclusion of a peace treaty by 2000 and the implementation of an economic cooperation plan remain at the top of Russian-Japanese relations. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 18 Sep 98) The Japanese media have suggested that the government has proposed a "Hong Kong option" by which the Japanese would obtain de facto control of the islands, to be followed by a handover at specified date in the future. (Interfax, 1629 GMT, 25 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-268) Yeltsin's pledge to respond to the proposal could prove to be complicated for him; following through with a response to the Japanese could strengthen bilateral relations with Japan while providing the conservative domestic opposition in Russia further ammunition against him. Any territorial change of hands could be spun as a blow to Russian territorial integrity and national pride, thereby turning a
possible foreign policy accomplishment into a domestic headache. Luckily, Russo-Japanese relations have pushed forward, indicating that although the resolution of these issues is a stated goal, economic and political cooperation will continue for the time being.

Chinese-Russian economic cooperation continues as well. At an inter-governmental Chinese-Russian Conversion and Cooperation Forum, the main topics concerned bilateral cooperation in science and trade. (Xinhua, 1938 GMT, 16 Sep 98; FBIS-CHI-98-259) Various projects aimed at boosting economic growth have been undertaken of late, including the opening of a sea route from China to the ROK via Russia and the commencement of work on a transport corridor to China via Vladivostok. (Xinhua, 1205 GMT, 21 Sep 98; FBIS-CHI-98-264). Economic topics such as these will undoubtedly highlight President Jiang Zemin’s 11-13 November visit to Russia.

Regarding the peninsular issue, Japan has suggested six-way talks among the DPRK, ROK, Japan, the US, China and Russia. Although the proposal is not yet official, Russia has responded positively, stating a willingness to participate in any form of talks aimed at stabilizing the situation on the peninsula. Russia's efforts at normalizing relations with Seoul and Pyongyang could prove to be helpful if the Japanese plan is realized. (Voice of Russia, 1200 GMT, 25 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-269)

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Michael Thurman

REGIONS
Regions respond to crisis
Regional responses to the present economic and political crisis vary, but two tactics seem to be the most common -- price regulation, and limits on inter-regional trade, primarily exports. How successful such moves have been are not known. However, some regions are dealing with escalating prices in a more creative way. Rather than capping prices, the government of Arkhangelsk has flooded the market with locally produced goods in order to keep supply up and prices down, according to the head of its legislature Nikolai Malakov. It is not immediately clear where the extra food is coming from or how the region plans to pay for the program. In Stavropol, leaders have established a series of "fairs," or more accurately, farmers' markets, whereby any producer -- either private or institutional -- can sell directly to the public, thereby eliminating the middlemen often accused of exacerbating the crisis with greedy profit-taking. Again it is not clear if the fairs will operate under some pricing system, or whether free market mechanisms will set prices. (ITAR-TASS, 1438 GMT, 6 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-249)

**Problems with the Vladivostok mayoral election**

The territorial election commission ruled on 26 September that acting mayor Viktor Cherepkov was ineligible to run for election. With no time to change the ballots printed days earlier, the decision was taken to cross out his name with ballpoint pens. Predictably, the people of Vladivostok believed something more sinister was afoot and they complained loudly and at times violently, with a couple of fistfights being reported. The president's representative in the Maritime Territory and the chief of the local Federal Security Service said that, even if the removal of Cherepkov's name from the ballot was a correct one, it was handled very poorly. Even so, the required minimum number of voters participated so the elections, however messy, will most likely be considered valid. (NTV, 1200 GMT, 27 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-270)

**FEDERAL ASSEMBLY**

Duma members pass law on wages and benefits
In the midst of Russia's economic crisis, deputies of the State Duma have been thinking of their own futures by passing an amendment to the present law regulating their legal status, wages and benefits. The law, eloquently titled the "Law on Introduction of Amendments and Additions to the Federal Law on the Status of a Federation Council Deputy and Status of a State Duma Deputy of the Russian Federation Federal Assembly," increases deputies' pay to the rate of a governmental minister, and provides him or her with additional payments for vacations, illnesses, and "Kurorten" or sanatoria. The additional benefits are, of course, tax-free.

Most interesting are articles 33 and 25. Article 33 ensures "the right to secure housing in the city of Moscow." This article provides "lump-sum compensation for the acquisition of housing with right of ownership." In effect, each deputy will be able to purchase and own an apartment in the capital at taxpayers' expense. Article 25 protects deputies in the event of the Duma's dissolution. It provides a lump-sum monetary payment "covering the period remaining in their term, but not to exceed one year."

Perhaps it should not be surprising that the deputies of the second Duma are busily constructing golden parachutes for themselves in the event they are cast out onto the economy they helped create. But such self-attention at a time of national emergency cannot possibly sit well with those in the hinterlands struggling to make ends meet. (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 11 Sep 98, p. 2; FBIS-SOV-98-259)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By Michael Reardon and Charles Drummond

Who's watching the prisoners? Not the Interior Troops
Back on 1 August, President Boris Yel'tsin signed a new defense concept document which outlined sweeping changes to the Russian armed forces. Included within was a diminished role for the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). It basically stated that the MVD will play the chief role in stopping, localizing and neutralizing internal armed conflicts on Russian Federation territory. The MVD will retain military forces, including some armored units, but will give up its current function of guarding communications facilities and convoys. Recruitment for this reformed federal guard will be conducted on a contract basis. (See Editorial Digest, Vol. III, No. 10) Almost seven weeks later, on 17 September, President Yel'tsin signed an edict concerning the MVD reform, providing additional details to the aforementioned defense concept. (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 23 Sep 98, p. 3; FBIS-SOV-98-272)

The edict calls for a strength reduction of 54,000 troops by 1 January 1999, with the main aim being to make the Interior Troops into a force for ensuring citizen's safety and fighting crime. This is a deep cut into the over 300,000-member force built by former Minister of the Interior Anatoli Kulikov just a few years ago, when the Interior Troops were reminiscent of a second Russian Federation army. Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin said, "The reforms envisage a move away from the troops' armed forces component, and their main task will remain the localization of internal conflicts." (NTV, 1800 GMT, 17 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-260)

Other significant aspects of the decree are as follows:
- The foundation of the Interior Troops will consist of three mobile groups of four or five divisions, which will be manned by contract soldiers.
- Only officers will serve in the independent operational division, the former Dzerzhinsky division.
- Interior Troops will hand over convoy functions to the Ministry of Justice.
- Most units guarding many important state facilities will be removed and disbanded.
- Special mechanized police units that used to be part of the Interior Troops will be cut and handed over to the command of regional interior directorates.
- The seven current Interior Troops districts will be reduced to four: Central, Volga Basin, Siberian and North Caucasus. (NTV, 1800 GMT, 17 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-260)

The decree was not unexpected by Interior Troops' officers as their central directorate had prepared proposals for reform two months ago; however, why Yeltsin signed it on 17 September was a mystery. Concerning the decree, current commander-in-chief Pavel Maslov said, "[it] only strengthened the concept of reform developed by the central directorate." Furthermore, referring to its contents, he commented, "We drafted this decree together, so it contains our ideas, too. Why shouldn't we be happy?"

It is interesting to note that on the same day President Yeltsin signed a decree reducing the roles and responsibilities of the Internal Troops, a move which allows the country's internal security to be ensured with fewer forces as is the practice in many other parts of the world, he also signed a second edict. The second edict formed an experimental "municipal police force" outside the framework of the interior ministry. The new municipal police force would last for 2 1/2 years. (Interfax, 1002 GMT, 17 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-260) The size of this experimental force could not yet be determined, nor its intended purpose -- Presidential/Kremlin bodyguards?

**When Hungary, pay for bread with spare planes...or maybe not**

Facing one of the worst harvests in 30 years, Russia reportedly has offered Hungary between five and eight MiG-29s in exchange for wheat. The MiG-29s being offered have been in use by the Russian military but are far from the end of their service life, according to reports. Initial details came from sources in both the Hungarian Embassy in Moscow and Russian defense industry. (Interfax, 1248 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-265) The next day Minister of Food and
Agriculture Viktor Semenov told Interfax that Russia would not import more than 3 million tons of grain, but did not rule out barter. (RFE/RL Newsline, 23 Sep 98) However, on 24 September, both Hungarian and Russian officials told a Hungarian newspaper that such a deal is not being considered. (Nepszabadsag, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-EEU-98-267) The bottom line on this deal is -- don't fire up those automatic bread makers just yet.

When you're not on top, you don't get to set the rules
Recently, Russia has only been interested in selling new arms systems. However, considering the country's current economic situation and large debt abroad, it appears discussions between Russia and the Czech Republic could be headed toward a deal to sell aircraft and aircraft spare parts to offset a debt. Currently, Russia owes the Czech Republic on the order of 492 million korunas (approximately $3.4 billion). Moscow has been paying off the interest only (to the tune of $120 million annually), with the principal payment postponed until 2002. (Hospodarske Noviny, 10 Sep 98; FBIS-EEU-98-254) The deal being considered includes Tu-154 aircraft (a transport aircraft to replace the 1971 vintage Tu-134) as well as spare parts for various fighter, transport, and combat aircraft and helicopters. Czech Defense Minister Vladimir Vetchy confirmed that his government has approved the deal when asked during a recent visit to Washington, DC. (RFE/RL Newsline, 29 Sep 98) It is becoming strikingly apparent that Russian arms dealers are up against hard times, with sales really declining. It appears that there would be strong pressure for them to come through with any deal that helps the dire economic situation of the Motherland.

Warning: Poverty may cause amnesia
The Belarusians sold seventeen surplus MiG-29s to Peru back in 1996. At that time, Russia warned the Peruvians that the deal might not be the bargain it appeared to be on the surface, and vowed not to provide any maintenance support or spare parts for these Russian-built planes. Well, that was two years ago. Since then, the Russian ruble has taken a nose dive, the military is only
starting to be paid for multiple months of back pay, significant arms sales are now few and far between, the faces of government have changed more than chameleons, and the president's power rating has dipped below that of a "AA" battery. Apparently, these hard times have produced a form of selective amnesia within at least some Russian decision makers as it is now being reported that the arms export company Rosvooruzhenie has signed a contract with the Peruvians. In this contract, the Russians will not only sell the Peruvians three additional MiG-29s, but will provide maintenance support and spare parts -- for the entire Peruvian fleet. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 18 Sep 98) One hopes this forgetful condition won't spread to weapons grade nuclear material and rogue nations...

'Close' only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades ... and ICBMs
Russia completed its summer missile-testing program with the successful launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile on 16 September. An RS-12M Topol missile (also known as an SS-25) took off from Plesetsk in northern Russia and its mock warhead successfully struck its target on the Kamchatka peninsula in far east Russia. (RFE/RL Newsline, 17 Sep 98, and Russia Reform Monitor, 18 Sep 98) According to the commander of the Strategic Missile Force (SMT), General Vladimir Yakolev, "all 57 launches of the Topol missiles have been successful." Accounting for the possibility of a liberal range in the definition of "successful," the results of this program appear to fall somewhere near the claims by the SMT press service. Namely, that the missile test "convincingly proves the high combat readiness of the forces and the reliability and technical readiness of ICBMs of this type." (RFE/RL Newsline, 17 Sep 98)

The Russian government plans to have 10 SS-27 (Topol-M) missiles produced in each of the next two years and 31 per year thereafter. Pentagon officials haven't appeared too concerned, saying that Moscow lacks the funds to produce them. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 17 Sep 98)
It is true that, even with the production rate above, Russia will only be able to field approximately 360 missiles by the year 2010. And it is also true that at that point the service life of most of Russia's other 750 strategic launchers will have expired. (Russia Reform Monitor, 18 Sep 98) But come on folks -- do the math, look at the big picture, smell the rocket fuel! Plesetsk to Kamchatka -- a mock warhead accurately on target. This isn't a North Korean No Dong and it certainly isn't for defense against China or Afghanistan. The missile tested earlier this month traveled roughly the distance from say, Siberia to Topeka, Kansas. Maybe we shouldn't focus on the 360 scheduled for production, but rather the 57 already tested successfully.

The law of averages was on their side
Plagued by numerous delays and failures in recent months (see Editorial Digest, Vol. III, Nos. 10 & 11), Strategic Missile Troops finally launched a satellite into space (and functioning properly) the first time. The SMT press service reported that a Molniya-M booster successfully lifted off from Plesetsk space center at 0341 hours on 29 September. The payload was a Cosmos series satellite which will provide long-range telephone and telegraph radio communication and broadcast television programs for the defense ministry. (ITAR-TASS, 1444 GMT, 29 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-272)

Nothing earth-shattering here -- except the aircraft
It certainly isn't late-breaking news to hear that the level of training for pilots in the Russian Air Force is low and getting lower. However, accident statistics released in the Russian media in September confirm what analysts following this decline have surmised from anecdotal evidence and individual reports for some time. Over the past six years this arm of the Russian military has had 30 fatal crashes, claiming 276 lives. The overall US military (including Navy and Marine Corps pilots) accident rate over the last several years has held steady at 1.5 per 100,000 flight hours. The Russian rate is more than double: 3.3-4 accidents per 100,000 flight hours. The simple fact is that Russian Air Force pilots get so little
flying time that they are far more accident-prone than US military aviators. Over the past six years the Russian Air Force flew, on average, just 180,000 hours each year. In contrast, the US Air Force last fiscal year flew more than 2,140,000 hours, with each active pilot averaging some 240 flight hours. A Russian pilot is lucky if he can log one-third of that amount. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 22 Sep 98) Before Russian pilots can strive for "practice makes perfect," they should concentrate on "practice makes proficient."

Promises made, promises kept?
In early September the Ministry of Defense promised it would pay back wages of Russian military personnel, who have gone months without pay. On 28 September it was reported that two months worth of back pay had indeed been delivered, however, a subsequent report on 30 September stated that only partial payments had been made. (RFE/RL Newsline, 29 Sep 98 and 1 Oct 98) Regardless of exactly how much money has been paid out so far, the timing of the decision to take care of the troops likely was not random. Various domestic and foreign news services remarked on the payments occurring just two weeks prior to a scheduled country-wide demonstration protesting the government’s nonpayment of wages. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 29 Sep 98)

The ministry's original announcement was interesting in both what was stated and what was not stated. It was not made clear that back wages across the services were to be paid. Only two particular groups were specifically mentioned: Personnel stationed outside of Russia were to receive "regular payments," and personnel discharged essentially due to the Russian armed forces' downsizing were to have "all payments to them" settled. (ITAR-TASS, 1304 GMT, 11 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-254) The actual payment announcement did not address either of those groups; instead, the recipients mentioned were the regular army and Russia's "other security services." (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 29 Sep 98) Making the military the first segment of the Russian Federation to receive its withheld wages comes as no surprise, as any government wanting to stay in
power, especially during hard times, might be expected to take care of its military personnel. What is surprising perhaps is how long it took for the government to act in this regard. Nowhere was the source of the funds mentioned, although it is reasonable to figure that the back pay was made possible through the recent "emission," the printing of billions of rubles by the returned head of Russia's Central Bank Viktor Gerashchenko.

In addition to the money payout, food handouts were to be given to cover past-due ration issues. (ITAR-TASS, 1304 GMT, 11 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-254) The distribution of food handouts was already in progress in at least one location -- the defense ministry itself. Moscow's NTV newscast "Segodnya" of 12 September reported on ministry officials receiving food items and ministry drivers receiving field rations. As the piece sardonically noted, "the state suddenly remembered its debts" after not paying its forces for over a year. The food handouts have not made their way beyond Moscow apparently, as the newscast also highlighted the fact that military units were fending for themselves, including taking time to harvest potatoes in order to make some money. (NTV, 1500 GMT, 12 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-255) This is in keeping with the trend across the Russian Federation of each region turning inward rather than counting on or expecting help from Moscow during these difficult economic times.

In a related development, the finance ministry announced that it was going to start payment of back wages to nuclear industry workers by allocating funds to the Ministry of Nuclear Energy. Unlike the defense ministry, the finance ministry stated how it expected to accomplish this -- through tax collection, "which is largely influenced by the activity of local administrations of the administrative-territorial formations and controlling borders." (ITAR-TASS, 1302 GMT, 14 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-257) The reporter from TASS did not avail himself of the opportunity to editorialize or predict on the likelihood of the workers receiving any back wages any time soon, given this payment source.
The trial of retired Captain Nikitin

The St. Petersburg Times reported that retired Navy Captain Aleksandr Nikitin is due to stand trial on 20 October on charges of espionage and treason. (St. Petersburg Times, 22 Sep 98; see also ISCIP Perspective, Sep-Oct 96) Nikitin turned his attentions to the environment after finishing up his naval career. It is his work for the Norwegian environmental organization The Bellona Foundation that has him in legal trouble with Russian authorities. Specifically, Nikitin is charged with passing classified information to a foreign organization when he co-authored a report on nuclear contamination and ecological damage caused by Russian nuclear-powered submarines. The Bellona Foundation (website: http://www.bellona.no) provides detailed coverage on Russian nuclear issues, both civilian and military, and as such maintains thorough coverage on the Russian navy's Northern Fleet. Its credibility in this area is enhanced by the contributions of Captain Nikitin, described by the foundation as a former submarine officer and nuclear safety inspector.

The upcoming trial is important for several reasons. Perhaps first and foremost is that it cuts to the heart of the question of whether the Russian Federation intends to follow its own published rules of law, or continue in the capricious and illegal ways of the Soviet Union. The Federal State Security Service (FSB) is in part basing its charges against Nikitin on unpublished secret decrees, "which predate the Law on State Secrets." (ISCIP Perspective, Sep-Oct 96) In addition, the defense has still not received copies of the decrees. Nikitin and Bellona assert that all the information detailed in the report is from unclassified documents, and indeed the report has an extensive footnote listing to back that claim. Interestingly, no one in the Russian Federation power structure, from Yel'tsin on down, has told the FSB to back off from what by all accounts appears to be a politically motivated scheme.

This trial is also important because it constitutes a bellwether for the old Soviet practice of intimidating current and future critics of Russian polices or
procedures. The outcome of the trial could have chilling consequences for reporting on anything that the authorities deem embarrassing, and will certainly hinder future reporting efforts on details of the Russian military forces.

The feeding of the Baltic Fleet

After the Russian Baltic Fleet announced in early September that it was running out of food reserves and had no money to buy more, Lithuania offered up food donations. The Russians accepted. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 15 and 17 Sep 98). Lithuania's offer was probably as pragmatic as it was magnanimous: Most of the Baltic Fleet's personnel (both sailors and supporting ground forces) are stationed in Kaliningrad. The fleet admitted to owing over $1 million already to Lithuanian food suppliers and that more money was not forthcoming from Moscow. (RFE/RL Newsline, 17 Sep 98) Nonetheless, despite no funds to buy food, the celebration of "the Soviet-era Tank Troop's Day with exercises simulating combat against western forces" took place on 13 September. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 15 Sep 98) Misplaced funding priorities are nothing new to the Russian navy. Noted professor Richard Starr, in a recent article in the US Naval Institute's Proceedings, remarked on the navy spending "the equivalent of $42 million" on commemorations in 1995 and 1996 at the expense of upkeep, operations, salaries or pensions. ("Russia's Navy Remains in Decline," US Naval Institute Proceedings, August 1998)

Farther north, the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol is not without its problems. There, the senior naval commander criticized Sevastopol authorities' "abusive actions," where the one reported example was the revocation of free use of the city's transportation system. More germane perhaps was the navy's complaint of city pressure on the navy to pay back taxes and utilities debts. The inference here again is that no funds are coming from Moscow. (RFE/RL Newsline, 18 Sep 98)

The Minsk: Scrap metal or China's first aircraft carrier?
The Russia Reform Monitor quoted from a Hong Kong newspaper that the former Russian aircraft carrier the Minsk arrived in a Chinese shipyard with its gun turrets still mounted. The article questioned why a ship ostensibly sold for scrap metal would still have weapons systems on board, and suggests that the Minsk transaction may very well be an arms sale under another name. (Russia Reform Monitor, 7 Sep 98) The sale of the carrier is further evidence of the decline of the former Soviet, and now Russian, navy. If the Minsk does resurface as China's first aircraft carrier, there still remains the question of what aircraft would be embarked on it. Certainly China has helicopters it can assign to the ship, though there are no reports that China is seeking to obtain the VTOL Yak-38 fixed wing aircraft that the Russian navy flew from its carriers. If refitted with its battery of torpedoes, surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missile systems, the Minsk would be a formidable addition to the Chinese fleet, even without any aircraft on board. The firepower of the carrier would far surpass that of any other ship in the People's Liberation Army navy.

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Sarah Miller

CIS reforms discussed, documents signed
At a recent meeting of the top economic body of the CIS -- the Presidium of the Interstate Economic Committee -- the topics of discussion included CIS reform and the creation of a free trade zone. (ITAR-TASS, 0846 GMT, 11 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-254) Russia's economic crisis has had a significant impact on the entire CIS. Interestingly, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma has been at the forefront of this movement, suggesting that a free trade zone "would be the best way out of the crisis for Ukraine, Russia, and our neighbors." Kuchma cited Kyrgyzstan's acceptance into the World Trade Organization as the perfect time to dissolve the reigning Customs Union and replace it with a "free trade zone in order to be guided by reality." The results of the presidium's meeting will be forwarded to the
CIS Heads of Government Council for its review. (Interfax, 1217 GMT, 17 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-260) The economic rapprochement between Ukraine and Russia certainly has played a role in Ukraine's favorable stance towards further CIS economic integration. Recent bilateral talks between the parliamentary heads were successful in perking Ukrainian interest in a Slavic union of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. However successful the recent economic talks have been, it is clear that Ukraine is sticking to its guns when discussing its border security. At an unrelated meeting, GUAM members Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan signed a border troop cooperation accord. Georgian Border Troops Commander Valeri Chkheidze cited the special "economic relationship among the four CIS member states" as a motivation for the accord, adding that "the border cooperation of the four countries is not aimed against anyone. Any country is free to join the agreement." Moldova is expected to sign the documents at a later date. (Interfax, 1243 GMT, 16 Sep 98; FBIS-UMA-98-259)

**Iran in the CIS?**
CIS reforms have come to an "evolutionary stage" requiring "smooth, realistic decisions," CIS Executive Director Boris Berezovsky said after a special meeting of a CIS reform body. Berezovsky provided a concrete example when he said, "the rules of the game inside a group of interested countries should be set" and then specifically mentioned Iran as a country with which there "is a huge reserve in relations." Berezovsky took this muse a step further when he suggested that the CIS shouldn't limit itself to the borders of the former USSR. (Interfax, 1544 GMT, 16 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-259) Iranian ties with the CIS have grown stronger as a result of both the situation in Afghanistan and Russia's overall foreign policy towards the Middle East. Iran responded, saying only, "Tehran has sought ways to expand further areas of cooperation with the CIS states."
(RFE/RL Newsline, 21 Sep 98)
UKRAINE

Will international lenders save Ukraine?

In the last month, Ukraine has received $3.9 billion in loans and/or credits from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). (Interfax, 1431 GMT, 7 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-250, and Interfax, 0857 GMT, 10 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-253) The flow of cash was begun by the IMF with a commitment to provide a $2.2 billion Extended Fund Facility Loan. Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma recently said that this IMF decision helped Ukraine "avert a crisis ... similar to the one in Russia." The IMF loan was, in fact, the key to both the World Bank's recent decision to lend over $800 million to Ukraine, and a decision by the EBRD to reverse its earlier position and award Ukraine credits of almost $950 million. (UT-1 Television Network, 1800 GMT, 16 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-260)

Whether Ukraine has averted a crisis is another question altogether. The Ukrainian hryvnya has devalued by at least 35 percent, the country has, in effect, defaulted on its internal debt by arbitrarily extending the maturity date of National Bank long-term securities from 1999 to 2001, and its ability to pay its external debt is dubious at best. (Kiyevshiye vedomosti, 14 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-257) Even with the injection of money from lending institutions, Ukraine now has only a $1 billion currency reserve, is facing massive inflation, and is dealing with wage arrears for some state workers reaching back up to six months. (Intelnews, 2347 GMT, 13 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-256, and ITAR-TASS, 1103 GMT, 26 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-269) In addition, Ukraine has lost its biggest export market -- Russia.

Yes, Virginia, there is a crisis. It is a crisis, however, that will either be calmed or aggravated from within. The country has a relatively well-functioning presidential administration, vigorous international support, and a cohesive, if somewhat
limited, anti-crisis plan. (Intelnews, 2346 GMT, 13 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-256) On the other hand, the Ukrainian legislature recently voted to ask Kuchma to eliminate cuts in the 1998 budget that are probably necessary in order to receive the next two tranches from the IMF. Ukraine is balanced on the edge of an unstable cliff. The actions of the legislature in the coming month will likely be paramount in dictating whether the country steps back or falls off.

**Caspian oil, here we come!**

At the recent "Silk Route" conference in Azerbaijan, Ukraine presented the joint Polish-Ukrainian plan to transport oil from the Caspian Sea, through Odessa, Brody and Gdansk to Supsa. The 12 members of TRACECA (Transport Corridor of Europe, the Caucasus and Asia) met in Baku to begin to develop a framework for connecting the Caspian to Asia and Europe. Ukrainian representatives left the conference satisfied after collecting support for their pipeline proposal from both Georgia and Azerbaijan. (Intelnews, 0157 GMT, 10 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-253) Polish representatives, meanwhile, gave "assurances about U.S. support for this undertaking." (Gazeta Wyborcza, 17 Sep 98, p. 1; FBIS- EEU-98-264) Russia, of course, has its own ideas about the transportation of Caspian Oil (through Russian territory), and had no comment on the Ukrainian plan. Ukraine, however, is not waiting for anyone's permission. Upon arriving home, Ukrainian First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Holubchenko told reporters that 300 kilometers of a pipeline connecting Odessa and Brody has already been constructed, and an oil terminal in Odessa is 20 percent complete, while Polish officials were equally confident about the project's completion. (Gazeta Wyborcza, 17 Sep 98, p. 1; FBIS-EEU-98-264)

During the conference, President Kuchma also announced the "acceleration of the construction of the Illchivsk-Poti railway line," while the transportation ministers of Ukraine, Georgia and Bulgaria signed a protocol on the development of the Illchivsk-Varna-Poti ferry line. (Uryadovyy Kuryer, 10 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-265)
Kuchma to Yel'tsin: Take our food, please

As expected, the "informal" summit held in Moscow on 18-19 September between Presidents Kuchma and Yel'tsin yielded minimal results, with one exception. The presidents agreed that Ukraine's debt to Russia will be repaid with "goods deliveries, especially food." (ITAR-TASS, 1200 GMT, 23 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-266) Kuchma said the debt amounts to $1 billion. The food deliveries to Russia will, no doubt, be appreciated by the defense ministry's officers, who have already gratefully tasted Ukrainian cuisine. Interfax recently reported that, whereas food rations used to include fresh meat and fish from Russia, "the only delicacy there now is canned meat from Ukraine." (Interfax, 1402 GMT, 12 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-255)

Bad, bad, little Russians!

Russian Duma Chairman Gennadi Seleznev arrived in Ukraine last week to speak before the Ukrainian parliament, and explain exactly why they should join "a strong union of the Slavic states." There was only one problem -- he was booed off the podium before he could finish his speech. In his speech, Seleznev had begun to discuss "a union without borders, customs barriers and with our citizens' sole right to live, work and study in one of the three states without the feeling of being foreigners." He said, "I'm convinced such a union will be supported by most of our citizens." Apparently, he was wrong. (Interfax, 0914 GMT, 29 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-272)

The nationalist Rukh faction of parliament began shouting Seleznev down, and left the room. The rest of parliament, with the exception of the Communist members, continued to interrupt until Seleznev was forced to end his speech early. (Interfax, 0835 GMT, 29 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-272) Seleznev later said he regretted that "Russian television showed distorted reports about the ... visit to Kiev," and wondered why the television didn't show the people in the parliament
who "greeted us as Slavic brothers." (Interfax, 0836 GMT, 30 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-273) Delusions can be so comforting.

BELARUS

All hail Primakov

Three weeks ago, Belarusian Foreign Minister Ivan Antonovich was railing at Russia for not responding to a proposal that the presidents of their countries meet. "The attempts to isolate Belarus ... are now being spread onto Russia as well," he said. The countries of the West, he explained, "impose their views on [Yeltsin] in these crisis times." (Interfax, 0635 GMT, 14 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-257) My, how things change. Belarus reacted with jubilation to the appointment of Yevgeni Primakov as prime minister of Russia. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka said, "Primakov shared my opinions on many issues before he became premier. I think he still does." (Interfax, 1422 GMT, 19 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-262)

Lukashenka and Primakov went right to work on the "Russia-Belarus Union." On 30 September, Primakov arrived in Minsk, bringing with him a document appointing himself chairman of the "Executive Committee of the Union of Belarus and Russia." (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1725 GMT, 30 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-273) After his talks with Lukashenka, Primakov said, "We will do everything to ensure that the union becomes stronger...." After all, he said, "When other CIS states see that the union member states benefit from being a member of the organization, the mood will grow among those countries to join the union." (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1137 GMT, 30 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-273) Lukashenka responded that the new Russian government seems to be on the right course now. (Interfax, 1148 GMT, 1 Oct 98; FBIS-SOV-98-274)

Christian values take center stage ...

"We are an Orthodox country and will always remain devoted to Orthodoxy." With those words, President Lukashenka welcomed Russian Orthodox Patriarch
Aleksei II to Belarus. Lukashenka also suggested that "Great Christian values" should become the "ideology" of Belarus. (ITAR-TASS, 1654 GMT, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-267) Aleksei II, meanwhile, took the opportunity to praise the "Russia-Belarus Union" as a union "of people of the same faith." (Interfax, 0543 GMT, 28 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-271)

... as food reserves plummet
Authorities announced on 18 September that "the validity of licenses authorizing exports of foodstuffs abroad, which were issued to legal entities in the past, is suspended." The official reason given is the necessity to "protect the republic's consumer market." Translation -- there is no extra food in Belarus. (Belanapan, 1350 GMT, 18 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-262) In fact, according to an investigative report published in the Belarusian Business Journal, Belarus is dangerously short of basic food items. The paper reported, "Until recently Belarus had a three-month store of imported rice, buckwheat and vegetable oil. There is almost nothing left today." The article also discovered a severe shortage of "fodder grain," suggesting that there may not be enough grain to feed the cattle this year, and noted that flour has disappeared. (Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta, 17 Sep 98, p. 1; FBIS-SOV-98-271) The report, of course, contradicts official administration statements, but the government's steps to prohibit the export of "foodstuffs" do not.

MOLDOVA
IMF still refusing to renew lending
On 22 September, Mark Horton, the IMF's permanent envoy to Moldova, once again reiterated that the IMF will not resume lending to Moldova until the country puts in place a coherent economic austerity program. Horton said the program should include privatization, spending reductions, and pension reforms. In July 1997, the IMF suspended aid to Moldova when the country failed to make the economic changes it had agreed to make a year earlier. Before its aid was
suspended, the country received $52.5 million. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1218 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-265)

Have nuclear waste, will travel
It appears that threats by the leaders of the breakaway Dniestr Republic to block a shipment of nuclear waste heading from Bulgaria to Russia were just that -- threats. Valeriy Kireev, director of the republic's Civil Defense Service, had threatened to block the tracks to stop a shipment of nuclear "tailings" that was being returned to Electrostal City in Russia from the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant in Bulgaria. (Basapress, 1615 GMT, 26 Aug 98; FBIS-SOV-98-238] However, the train(s) apparently arrived in Electrostal City during the last week in September with no incidents along route. (Romania Libera, 19 Sep 98, p. 7; FBIS-EEU-98-264)

Newly Independent States: Transcaucasia

By Miriam Lanskoy

DAGESTAN
Chronology for September
Sep 3: Sergei Stepashin, the Russian interior minister, visited the Dagestani villages that declared themselves a Muslim territory in August. He promised that force would not be used against them. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 0958 GMT, 3 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-246)

Sep 4: An explosion in Makhachkala killed 16 persons, injured 68 persons, and destroyed 10 houses. The district under attack is home to Makhachkala Mayor Said Amirov and Dagestani Prime Minister Khizri Shikhasaidov; both survived unhurt. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1405 GMT, 5 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-248)
Sep 5: Russian and Chechen leaders reacted to the blast. Sergei Stepashin said, "Actually, they have declared war on us, and we accept it." To fight the war Russia must bolster the interior forces division stationed in Makhachkala. (Interfax, 1359 GMT, 5 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-248) Former Deputy Prime Minister Ramazan Abdulatipov proposed instituting direct presidential rule to ease tensions in Dagestan. (Interfax, 1030 GMT, 5 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-248) Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov stated that "under no circumstances will I allow to involve Chechnya in Dagestan affairs." (Interfax, 1714 GMT, 5 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-248)

Sep 9: Magomed Khachilaev, the leader of the Lak national movement, a member of Salman Raduev's Caucasian Home organization, and deputy to Dagestan's parliament, was arrested in connection with the insurrection he led in May 1998. State Council Chairman Mogomedali Magomedov met with other members of the Lak movement to explain the arrest. (ITAR-TASS, 1612 GMT, 9 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-252)

Sep 10: Salman Raduev announced that he would launch strikes against Dagestan unless Khachilaev is released by 13 September. (ITAR-TASS, 1352 GMT, 10 Sep 98; FBIS-UMA-98-253)

Sep 13: Raduev decided that he would postpone the implementation of his threat against Dagestan. (Interfax, 1119 GMT, 13 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-256)

Sep 16: Akhmednabi Makhtigadzhiev was appointed Security Council secretary to replace Magomed Tolboev, who was relieved of his duties following Khachilaev's insurrection in May. (ITAR-TASS, 1045 GMT, 16 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-259)

Sep 24: State Council Secretary Magomedov met with Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov. After the meeting Magomedov told journalists: "There are no
anti-Russian feelings in Dagestan" and the region has every intention to remain within the Russian Federation. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1445 GMT, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-268)

Sep 26: Russian President Boris Yel'tsin asked Prime Minister Primakov and Finance Minister Zadornov to send financial aid to the interior ministry police forces in Dagestan. (ITAR-TASS, 1313 GMT, 26 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-269)

ARMENIA

Armenian passports for Nagorno-Karabakh residents?

During his electoral campaign to become Armenia's president, Robert Kocharian promised that he would create a commission to review the constitution. The amendments he proposed then pertained to altering the balance of power between the branches of government in favor of the parliament and eliminating the prohibition against dual citizenship. So far, Kocharian has shown no particular haste to limit his own powers as president; he has, however, renewed the call for allowing dual citizenship for the diaspora Armenians. (Snark, 1400 GMT, 9 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-260) This category includes the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. The co-chairman of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenian interparliamentary commission, Emma Gabrielian, said that Nagorno-Karabakh residents would be issued Armenian passports in the future. With time this arrangement and the participation of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians as candidates in Armenian elections would lead to "unity in the electoral process," according to Albert Bazeian, the other co-chairman of the commission. (Noyan Tapan, 1300 GMT, 10 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-264) The foreign ministry of Nagorno-Karabakh officially denied that Armenian passports were being issued to its residents. Rather, they carry Soviet passports and are entitled to "special status passports, with a view to carrying out legislative activity on the territory of Armenia." (Snark, 1700 GMT, 16 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-264)

The significance of Armenia's TRACECA proposals
Armenia participated in the recent conference on the Transport Corridor of Europe, the Caucasus and Asia (TRACECA), which is an EU-sponsored set of initiatives to promote the development of transportation and communication links between Europe and Central Asia via the Caucasus. For Armenia this forum is of particular importance because, lacking a seashore, it must depend on overland transportation to nearby ports. Armenia has also been subject to a boycott by Azerbaijan and Turkey which resulted in a dependence on Georgia and Iran for shipping and travel. Armenia proposed three routes to the conference. A railway linking Batumi, Yerevan, Nakhichevan, and Tehran; a railway route from Kars to Tbilisi via the Armenian town Gyumri; a Yerevan-Tbilisi highway. (Bakinskiy Rabochiy, 9 Sep 98, p. 2; FBIS-SOV-98-265) These proposals suggest that Armenia intends to continue its reliance on Georgia and Iran and that quite extensive travel and trade is possible without Turkey's and Azerbaijan's participation.

**Ignored by US Congress**

The US Congress has once again renewed the ban on direct aid to Azerbaijan which has been in place since 1992. The House rejected the Appropriations Committee's recommendation to remove the ban. The Senate version likewise maintains the provision. (Snark, 1500 GMT, 19 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-265) The administration, which lobbied against the provision and sent a letter expressing regret to President Aliev of Azerbaijan, has the power to waive its operation, but has not done so in the past. The ban is a particularly bitter pill for Azerbaijan this year because the same bill grants Nagorno-Karabakh $20 million. (Turan, 1200 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-266) The embargo punishes Azerbaijan for maintaining a blockade against Armenia even though the humanitarian crisis that led to its initial adoption is long over and Armenia has adapted handsomely to the situation.

**AZERBAIJAN**

**Masses rally against upcoming elections**
The five parties which comprise the opposition to President Heider Aliev held two mass protests in the capital. On 12 September the protesters, who wanted to rally in Baku's main square, were prevented from doing so by the police. In excess of 200 persons were arrested, there were reports of police violence against journalists and other participants, as well as allegations of torture while in detention. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1707 GMT, 12 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-255) A second rally was held on 20 September and did not involve violence. Both rallies attracted in the neighborhood of 50,000 participants.

Opposition leaders have put forward several proposals, some of which are contradictory: equal representation on the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) for the governing and the opposition parties; the postponement of the elections; a dialogue with the authorities; the resignation of the current government. (Turan, 0500 GMT, 19 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-262, and ITAR-TASS, 1615 GMT, 20 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-263) While the government has made several important concessions to the opposition, like the lifting of censorship restrictions, the membership of the CEC became a real stumbling block. And properly so, because that institution administers the elections and has the power to curtail fraudulent practices. All the same, the OSCE has indicated that the current election law and composition of the CEC is compatible with holding democratic elections. (Turan, 1700 GMT, 11 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-255) Perhaps the opposition underestimated its own popularity in deciding to boycott the election: Since they are not participating, they have no chance of winning and all they can hope for is a cancellation of the vote.

**GEORGIA**

**Ajaria-Djavakheti union?**

Aslan Abashidze, the leader of Ajaria, refuted his earlier statement that President Eduard Shevardnadze had offered to merge Ajaria and the Samtskhe-Djavakheti region under his leadership. (Resonance, No. 268, 1 Oct 98, p. 2; Annotated Daily Headlines of the Georgian Press, 1 Oct 98) This possibility was discussed
in the Georgian press after the Armenian nationalist movement, Javakh, made known its preference for joining Ajaria. (Resonance, No. 259, 22 Sep 98; Annotated Daily Headlines of the Georgian Press, 23 Sep 98) If ever instituted, such a union would give the Armenians of the region autonomy but only in partnership with the Muslim residents of Ajaria. More importantly, it would form a single territorial entity that stretches from Armenia to the Black Sea and to a significant degree functions outside of Georgia’s direct control.

**Border guards take control of some coastline; sign GUAM agreement**

On August 31, Georgian border guards took over for the Russian border guards at the Poti port which will serve as a major oil terminal. The transfer did not pass without incident; a Russian officer, Colonel Viktor Bashkirtsev, was detained briefly while leading a group of 25 armed comrades to Poti. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1413 GMT, 7 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-250) The head of the border guards, Major General Valeriy Chkheidze, indicated that, although not limited to Poti, the coast guard has made only occasional trips to Batumi and avoids the maritime segment of Abkhazia. (Svobodnaya Gruziya, 30 Aug 98, p. 2; FBIS-SOV-98-267)

The border guards of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova will cooperate according to an agreement signed on 16 September. (Interfax, 1243 GMT, 16 Sep 98; FBIS-UMA-98-259) Although the participant states deny that the Economic Consultation Union GUAM has emerged as a counterweight to the CIS, the organization thwarts Russia’s ambition to control the borders of the CIS member states.

**Newly Independent States: Central Asia**

By Monika Shepherd

KYRGYZSTAN
Foreign ministry denied any possibility of Taliban recognition
Perhaps carried away by the news that the leaders of the Taliban and the (Afghan anti-Taliban) northern alliance had agreed to meet in Bishkek to discuss ways of ending the Afghan civil conflict (ITAR-TASS, 0954 GMT, 9 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-252), Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Foreign Minister, Alikbek Jekshenkulov, told ITAR-TASS on 9 September that his government had not eliminated the possibility of granting diplomatic recognition to the Taliban. (ITAR-TASS, 0956 GMT, 9 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-252) The following day, Foreign Minister Erlan Abdylldaev informed Interfax in no uncertain terms that, although the Kyrgyz government is cognizant of the fact that the Taliban constitute a genuine political force in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan continues to recognize former President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government as Afghanistan's only legal representative. (Interfax, 0807 GMT, 10 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-253)

Kyrgyz armed forces to help guard CIS border
Following the Commonwealth-98 joint military exercises in which Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Belarusian, and Russian troops took part, it was announced that a Kyrgyz air defense regiment would soon be joining the other CIS forces which guard the CIS member states' external borders. (Vecherniy Bishkek, 8 Sep 98, p. 2; FBIS-UMA-98-252) The Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Belarusian, and Russian governments plan to sign an agreement sanctioning the Kyrgyz forces' participation in patrolling the CIS borders, and the Russian government has promised to supply more sophisticated air defense equipment. (Kyrgyz Radio First Program Network, 1300 GMT, 25 Sep 98; FBIS-UMA-98-268)

Comment
It was not specified where the Kyrgyz air defense regiment will be stationed. One possibility is that the regiment will be used to guard the Afghan border, either in Kyrgyzstan or in Tajikistan. Tajikistan's president has repeatedly requested troop reinforcements to patrol his republic's border with Afghanistan, particularly since the Taliban began taking control of northern Afghanistan. The Russian
government has seemed somewhat reluctant to transfer additional numbers of its own forces to the Tajik-Afghan border; perhaps the Kyrgyz air defense units will be used to meet President Rahmonov's request instead.

Prohibited opposition rally in Jalalabad results in arrests
On 25 September, an opposition rally in the southern Kyrgyz town of Jalalabad was attended by approximately 200 people and resulted in two arrests. The rally had been banned by local authorities after its organizers disagreed with town administration officials over where the event should take place. (Interfax, 0631 GMT, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-267) The demonstration was organized by Kyrgyzstan's opposition parties, in order to protest a referendum on constitutional amendments which is scheduled to take place in October. (Interfax, 1219 GMT, 25 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-268) President Akaev has proposed a number of amendments to Kyrgyzstan's constitution, and in a move to circumvent parliament (many of whose members oppose the amendments and are drafting their own constitutional changes), his administration is planning to hold a referendum.

The rally participants called for the referendum to be canceled and also for Prime Minister Kubanychbek Jumaliev's resignation. In the unlikely event that their demands should be met, opposition leaders intend to nominate Usen Sadykov, leader of the opposition agrarian party and a member of parliament, for the post of prime minister. Rally organizers were expecting at least 100,000 people to turn out for the protest in Jalalabad, but less than half that number actually appeared (Interfax, 0934 GMT, 23 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-266), perhaps due to a fear of government reprisals.

Government tries to restrict further inflow of Tajik refugees
Kyrgyz government authorities have stated that they will grant citizenship rights only to those Tajik refugees who arrived in Kyrgyzstan prior to 1995. The institution of this new policy was explained in a television broadcast by a private
network in Bishkek on 23 September as an attempt to prevent additional Tajik citizens from emigrating to Kyrgyzstan, in order to escape the economic problems which they face in their own republic. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 0330 GMT, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-267)

**Comment**
The majority of those Tajik citizens who fled to Kyrgyzstan during Tajikistan's civil war are ethnic Kyrgyz, and many of them have probably been taken in by relatives. Few of them appear to want to return to Tajikistan, no doubt at least partly due to the fact that Tajikistan's economy is in a shambles, but perhaps also out of fear. During the civil war, many people were killed or forced to flee based not only on their ethnic identity, but also on their regional affiliation. There are undoubtedly many Tajik refugees who fear that, if they return home, they will once again be targeted by those who originally forced them to leave. It should also be pointed out that the Tajik civil war did not come to an end until December 1996, when the first lasting cease-fire was signed between the Tajik government and the opposition.

**TAJKISTAN**

**Suspects in UNMOT murders confess to crime**
The three men suspected of having carried out the murders of the four UN Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT) employees in Garm District last July have apparently confessed to the crime. Jumakhon Khatami, the head of the Tajik interior ministry's press service, informed ITAR-TASS on 13 September that, upon being formally charged with the murders and confronted with proof of their crime, all three men admitted to killing the UNMOT personnel. The men (Mirsomuddin Valiev, Yaqub Darveshev, and Saidrahmon Dovudov) were members of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) and, according to information obtained by members of the investigation, one of them had received training "in the science of terror and organizing sabotage" in Afghanistan in 1994. The interior ministry claims to have evidence that the murders were neither personal
nor "clearly criminal," but thus far ministry officials have declined to provide any further details about the motives behind the murders. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 0720 GMT, 13 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-256).

**Comment**

If one or all of the suspects joined the UTO in or prior to 1994, then the training that they received in Afghanistan was most likely military practice in a UTO camp. Since many of the UTO forces' attacks on Tajik government and Russian guard posts consisted of guerrilla raids, it would not be at all surprising if most UTO troops were taught the tactics of guerrilla warfare, rather than of conventional combat.

**NRC representative shot to death in Dushanbe**

On 22 September at approximately 8:00 a.m., Otakhon Latifi, a member of the UTO and a representative on the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), was attacked and killed outside of his home in Dushanbe. One eyewitness reported seeing a man approach and greet Mr. Latifi immediately before the murder took place, and then enter a car that was waiting nearby. Mr. Latifi reportedly began running, but then fell to the ground. None of the witnesses remembered hearing shots fired, although police found three bullet wounds from a pistol in the victim's body. (ITAR-TASS, 0627 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-265)

Otakhon Latifi was a professional journalist who became involved in politics in the 1980s. He obtained the post of deputy prime minister for culture and education in 1991 and joined the UTO between 1991 and 1992. After returning to Tajikistan in 1997, he became a member of the NRC, chairing the committee on legal matters. (ITAR-TASS, 0627 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-265)

Both the UTO leadership and the Tajik government quickly issued statements condemning Mr. Latifi's murder and both sides accused the murderers of
attempting to obstruct the inter-Tajik peace process. (Radio Tajikistan First Channel Network, 0800 GMT, 22 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-265, and Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 0330 GMT, 23 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-266) The UTO leadership further stated that in addition to hindering the reestablishment of peace in Tajikistan, the killers also wanted to create conflict between the opposition and the government. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 0330 GMT, 23 Sep 98, FBIS-SOV-98-266)

Comment
This is not the first time that a member of the UTO has been killed since the December 1996 cease-fire was signed; however, Mr. Latifi's death marks the first murder of an NRC representative. The opposition statement blames the spate of shootings and threats against its members on the slowness of the peace process and also points to this latest tragedy as evidence that the Tajik armed forces appear to be powerless to prevent the wave of crime which still plagues the country.

Government accuses UTO of ordering UNMOT employees' murders
Perhaps partially in response to the UTO leadership's declaration that the Tajik government is unable to protect its citizens from crime, on 24 September President Rahmonov's administration broadcast a statement on Dushanbe's Radio Tajikistan First Channel Network in which it accused the UTO of committing a variety of offenses. The most dramatic of these accusations was that it was a UTO commander who ordered the deaths of the four UNMOT personnel last July. The 460 opposition troops who are stationed in Dushanbe to provide security for the UTO representatives on the NRC were also charged with committing murder; they were blamed for the death of Mr. Imomnazarov, a deputy chairman of the Customs Committee, who was killed approximately one month ago. The statement also accused a number of UTO commanders (among them Sanginov, Mansur, Eshon-i Daroz, and Rawshan) of leaving their zones of deployment and attacking and robbing government institutions. All of these types
of actions were, of course, deemed threats to the peace process by the
government's statement. (Radio Tajikistan First Channel Network, 0600 GMT, 24
Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-267)

**Comment**

At least two of the commanders named in the government's statement have been
denounced by the opposition leadership and are no longer considered to be
members of the UTO. Sanginov was expelled over a year ago, and the
government itself describes Rawshan as a former supporter of Rezvon Sodirov's
militia group, which was a renegade force with no real loyalties to any one side.

**Suspension of peace process narrowly averted**

On 26 September, Sultan Khamadov, the press secretary for the UTO,
announced that the opposition leadership was suspending its members'
participation in the NRC and in the Tajik government. This action was taken in
protest of the government's "inability to meet assumed obligations to ensure
safety of OTO [UTO] representatives to executive bodies of authority and
to the National Reconciliation Commission." The fatal attack on Otakhon Latifi
and an attempt to blow up one of the barges being used to repatriate the last
group of UTO troops in Afghanistan to Tajikistan were cited as the most recent
and most dramatic evidence of government impotence in the area of law
enforcement. In conclusion, Khamadov stated that the UTO would only be able to
resume its participation in the peace process once Latifi's murderers had been
identified and opposition personnel had been provided with adequate security.
(ITAR-TASS, 0923 GMT, 26 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-269)

On 28 September, following an all-day meeting between UTO Chairman Said
Abdullo Nuri, President Rahmonov and all UTO representatives on the NRC and
in the cabinet, presidential spokesman Zafar Saidov informed journalists that the
peace process would continue. President Rahmonov's administration agreed to
establish a six-member joint commission in order to supervise the investigation of
Otakhon Latifi's death, as well as to take additional measures to protect UTO members from further such incidents. In a joint statement released by the Tajik president and the UTO chairman, the two men called for the formation of a joint force to combat organized crime, pledged to adhere to the terms of the "Act on Mutual Understanding and Refusal of Mutual Recriminations in Mass Media" and agreed to resolve all future disagreements and conflicts through mutual consultations. Mr. Nuri and President Rahmonov are also to meet and discuss the peace process on a regular basis. (ITAR-TASS, 1901 GMT, 28 Sep 98, FBIS-SOV-98-271)

**Comment**

Although Tajik government forces and UTO members for the most part have stopped fighting each other on the ground since December 1996, the war of words between the two sides has not ceased, as these last few weeks have amply demonstrated. In the realm of verbal and written recriminations, President Rahmonov's administration has a clear advantage over the UTO leadership, because the government has access to all of the local media outlets. The UTO is rarely given the opportunity to air its views on local television or radio programs, and often seems to turn to Iranian radio stations in order to reach at least part of Tajikistan's population. Mr. Latifi's murder and the bombing of the barge being used to transport UTO troops from Afghanistan undoubtedly did provide much of the reason for the opposition's temporary withdrawal from the peace process, but the media war between the two sides probably also helped bring an already tense situation to the breaking point. The declaration of a cease-fire in the verbal war that the two sides have continued to wage, in spite of the peace agreement, might go a long way towards increasing cooperation between the government and the UTO.

**TURKMENISTAN**

President Niazov signs array of economic agreements with China
The Chinese government has agreed to grant Turkmenistan a sizable amount of economic aid, in the form of a 100-million-yuan easy-term loan, as well as a grant of 3 million yuan to be used in the advancement of priority sectors of the Turkmen economy. President Niazov also succeeded in obtaining the Chinese government's cooperation in the development of Turkmenistan's oil and natural gas industries during his four-day stay in Beijing. Eight Chinese companies will invest both in Turkmen offshore oil and gas fields and in the construction of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China, from where the natural gas will then be transported to Japan. The Chinese government also signed a number of economic agreements with Turkmenistan, including accords on technological cooperation and air communication. Overall, it was a very successful trip for President Niazov, who returned to Ashgabat from Beijing on 4 September. (Interfax, 1549 GMT, 4 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-248)

**Turkey attempts to gain Turkmen cooperation over Afghan conflict**
On 7 September, Mehmet Ali Irtemcelik, a special envoy of the Turkish foreign ministry, handed President Niazov a letter from Turkey's President Suleyman Demirel in which Turkey's president requested the Turkmen government's aid over the issue of the Afghan civil war. In the letter, President Demirel suggested holding a conference between his country and the five Central Asian states in order to discuss ways of settling the Afghan conflict. The Turkmen president, however, refused Turkey's overtures, stating that his government will not violate its neutral status by interfering in another state's internal affairs, particularly when that state happens to shares a border with Turkmenistan. (ITAR-TASS, 2100 GMT, 7 Sep 98; FBIS-WEU-98-250)

**President Niazov focuses on military reform, sacks two top officials**
On 14 and 17 September President Niazov met with leading members of the Turkmen military and law enforcement bodies in order to draw up a list of necessary reforms for the armed forces. Increasing discipline in military units and improving the training policies of the armed forces are seen as two of the most
urgent tasks for military reform. (Turkmen Press, 1105 GMT, 24 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-268) On 17 September, as part of his efforts to restructure significantly his country's armed forces, the Turkmen president fired Defense Minister Danatar Kopekov and Chief of the General Staff Akmurad Mulkamanov. First Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee Farid Atamuradov and NSC Deputy Chairman for Military Counterintelligence Vladimir Efanov were also removed from their posts and a number of other officials were demoted. (Interfax, 1415 GMT, 17 Sep 98; FBIS-SOV-98-260)

These changes are generally interpreted as a response to the violent incident which occurred at the Kazandzhik training base (about 240 km west of Ashgabat) of the 212th infantry division on 12 September. Five soldiers raided the camp's arsenal and stole 25 weapons, a large supply of cartridges and bullet-proof vests and then fled from the camp. On their way, they hijacked a truck, first killing its driver and passenger, and then took seven people hostage when they reached the village of Garagan in Bakharden District. Law enforcement units eventually managed to gain control of the situation, but in the process one policeman and a hostage were killed, as well as four of the renegade soldiers. (Turkmen Press, 1105 GMT, 24 Sep 98, FBIS-SOV-98-268)

UZBEKISTAN

Government committee boasts of country's mineral wealth
In an article published in Tashkentskaya pravda on 9 September, Deputy Chairman of the Uzbek Committee on Geology Gani Abdurahmanov proudly declared that the value of Uzbekistan's already discovered mineral deposits currently stands at $35 billion. Uzbekistan contains large uranium deposits (according to Mr. Abdurahmanov, his country ranks in the top ten worldwide for uranium extraction), substantial copper reserves, as well as silver and gold reserves (apparently Uzbekistan is in the top five worldwide for gold deposits). Most recently, Uzbek geologists also discovered that their country contains its own lithium deposits (lithium is used in electronic, medical and metallurgical
technologies). In terms of fuel deposits, Uzbekistan cannot compete with its neighbors, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, but according to Mr. Abdurahmanov, it does possess over 440 "oil and gas fields, mines, pits and plants" currently in operation. (Tashkentskaya pravda, 9 Sep 98, p. 3; FBIS-SOV-98-265)

Comment
During the Soviet period, Uzbekistan served primarily as a producer of cotton and other raw materials for the Soviet economy. Today, cotton is still cultivated for export on the hard currency market, but its days as the linchpin of the Uzbek economy are numbered. Excessive irrigation and overfertilization have severely damaged large areas of Uzbekistan's soil. Central Asia's water resources are also quickly shrinking. The Uzbek government will soon need to look to other sectors of its economy to produce sufficient revenue for the state budget; perhaps one sector being considered is the mineral resource industry. However, in order to develop this industry, the Uzbek government will need to attract much more foreign investment than it has thus far been able to do.

Newly Independent States: Baltic Region
By Kate Martin

LATVIA
Voters say 'yes' to easing of citizenship requirements
In a clear signal that Latvian citizens did indeed want their say concerning proposed amendments to the country's citizenship law, approximately 70 percent of the electorate turned out on 3 October to vote on the referendum. The result was a resounding maybe--the referendum passed, barely, with 53 percent of the vote. Almost 45 percent voted against the measure, thereby validating the For the Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK faction's strong resistance during parliamentary debates this past summer. The amendments allow for the removal of naturalization quotas and the granting of citizenship to children born in post-
independence Latvia. (Latvian Radio, 1100 GMT, 4 Oct 98; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 5 Oct 98/nexis)

The referendum had garnered international attention and pressure, with several countries and organizations making it clear that a rejection of the proposed changes would put at risk Latvia's possible integration into Western economic and security organizations. That pressure was cited by both camps as motivation to reject or support the measure, respectively. (See previous Digests)

Praise for the results could be heard from near and far. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe hailed the vote as an important step towards solving the problem of integrating ethnic minorities. (ITAR-TASS, 2322 GMT, 4 Oct 98; FBIS-SOV-98-278) Officials from the Council of Europe said passage of the referendum would aid Latvia's bid to join European organizations. And, speaking on state television after preliminary results were collected, President Guntis Ulmanis, a supporter of the amendments, said that "for the first time in Latvia's history," a Latvian president would sign a law approved by the people. (BBC Online Network, 0907 GMT, 5 Oct 98; http://news.bbc.co.uk) "This decision, democratically reached through a national referendum, indicates the Latvian people's strong commitment to the international human rights standards," according to US State Department deputy spokesman James Foley. "This law is an important and necessary step in Latvia's road to integrating fully into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions," he said. (Agence France-Presse, 1941 PDT, 5 Oct 98; clari.net) Even Russia, which had long decried Latvia's citizenship requirements as constituting human rights violations directed against Russian-speaking non-citizens, issued what could be seen as a positive reaction, if not outright praise, which at this point would have strained the borders of credibility. "A clear signal was given... that Latvian people connect the long-term interests of their country with achievement of inter-ethnic harmony, integration of society and observance of human rights," Russian foreign ministry spokesman Vladimir
Rakhmanin reportedly told the Interfax news agency. (BBC Online Network, 0907 GMT, 5 Oct 98)

Voters also elected a new parliament and, according to preliminary figures, former PM Andris Skele's People's Party is the front-runner. With all of the votes counted, the results were: The People's Party, 20.93 percent; The Latvian Way Union, 18.22 percent; The People's Harmony Party, 14.23 percent; The Union for the Fatherland and Freedom-LNNK, 14.15 percent; The Latvian Social Democratic Union, 12.87 percent; The New Party, 7.40 percent; The Latvian Union of Peasants, 2.46 percent; The Association of the Labor Party, the Christian Democratic Union, and the Latvian Green Party, 2.3 percent; The People's Movement for Latvia, 1.74 percent; The Democratic Party Saimnieks, 1.6 percent; The Latvian Rebirth Party, 0.52 percent; The Latvian Unity Party, 0.52 percent; The National Progress Party, 0.51 percent; The Latvian National Democratic Party, 0.35 percent; The Social Democratic Women's Organization, 0.35 percent; The People's Group Freedom, 0.32 percent; The Land of Mara Party, 0.32 percent; The Conservative Party, 0.26 percent; Helsinki-86, 0.22 percent; The Democrats Party, 0.08 percent; The Latvian National Reform Party, 0.05 percent. With the five-percent barrier closing off all but six groups, and seats given in proportion to the vote, the parliamentary breakdown looks as follows: The People's Party, 24 seats; Latvia's Way, 21 seats; For the Fatherland and Freedom, and its ally, the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK), 17 seats; The People's Harmony bloc [comprised of the People's Harmony Party, the Socialist Party, the Ravnopravie (Equal Rights) Movement and the Russian Party], 16 seats; The Social-Democratic Union, 14 seats; and The New Party, 8 seats. (Agence France-Presse, 2130 PDT, 4 Oct 98; clari.net, and Radio Riga Network, 1100 GMT, 4 Oct 98; FBIS-SOV-98-277) Ulmanis said he would do his utmost to name a candidate for prime minister on the first or second day of the work of the newly elected Saeima after meeting with representatives of the six parties/factions which were elected. (ITAR-TASS, 2322 GMT, 4 Oct 98; FBIS-SOV-98-278)