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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Erratic behavior again causes concern

President Yel'tsin had long been anticipated to subject his government to bitter criticism and on 26 February, when a key government meeting postponed from 1 December was finally convened, it appeared as though Yel'tsin was prepared to meet expectations. Starting off the meeting with an angry attack on the government's shortcomings and the country's continuing economic problems, Yel'tsin vowed to find the "culprits" responsible for the government's failure. The president further suggested that two or three officials would be dismissed by the end of the meeting.

Yel'tsin must have changed his mind however, because he abruptly left the meeting following an hour-long address by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. Chernomyrdin's address was itself highly critical of the government's performance. Yel'tsin's departure was unexpected enough to spark speculation as to the state of his health -- his movements were halting, he coughed frequently, but spoke coherently without notes. A Kremlin spokesman claimed that, despite the impulsive appearance of the president's exit, it had been planned; in fact, the president went directly to the Kremlin to record his weekly radio address.

In any event, the long-awaited personnel changes have begun. Please see the "Government" section for further information.

APPARAT
The Yumashev shuffle
Each new chief of the President's Staff gets his opportunity to restructure the Kremlin apparat, and Valentin Yumashev provides no exception. Despite so many attempts to reshuffle the deck however, eventually a familiar configuration or two reappears in the new schematic. So it is with the Main Cossack Department, once independent then subordinated to the Presidential Staff: It is now slated, according to the latest presidential decree, to be extracted from the staff, constituted as a Federal Organ independent of all but presidential oversight. (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 14 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-048)

There are innovations in the Yumashev plan however. Several staff commissions and departments are amalgamated into more broadly defined administrations. In this regard, folding the president's Archive, Clerical Work Department, Computer Database Department, Software and Technical Support departments, among others, into a Presidential Information and Documentation Support Administration would seem to be a sensible, and perhaps even efficient, move.

Most notable among the changes envisaged by Yumashev is an enumerated maximum limit on personnel per department and overall. The President's Staff, as set forth in this decree, will comprise a maximum of 1,945 employees, which represents a reduction of 100 staffers. The personnel cuts will come from the various subdivisions of the staff, including 8 from the Security Council Apparatus (leaving a total of 45); 12 from the Defense Council apparatus (leaving a total of 88); and 8 from the State Military Inspectorate (leaving a total of 168). But wait. As is often the case, recent developments may have already out paced this reform. See "Security Council" below.

SECURITY COUNCIL
Rybkin transferred, Kokoshin steps in
In connection with changes to the composition of the government, Ivan Rybkin has been replaced as secretary of the Security Council. (RIA-Novosti, 2 Mar 98)
Andrei Kokoshin, formerly chair of the RF Defense Council and chief of the State Military Inspectorate, will assume leadership of the Security Council from Rybkin. (RIA-Novosti, 3 Mar 98) In line with Kokoshin's move to the Security Council, the Defense Council and State Military Inspectorate are to be abolished, with their mandates and staffs to be aligned with and absorbed into the Security Council apparatus.

The personnel and structural changes have generated policy ramifications as well. Chechen policy will no longer be formulated by the Security Council but will move with Rybkin to become part of the government's competence. Andrei Kokoshin, in addition to supervising the synthesis of Security and Defense Councils, has been directed by President Yel'tsin to work with Chernomyrdin to produce and submit within one month a new plan outlining military development and reform. (RIA-Novosti, 3 Mar 98)

GOVERNMENT

Have the 'culprits' been identified?

The dismissals promised by President Yel'tsin at the government's 26 February meeting were announced over the weekend. Valeri Serov, deputy prime minister in charge of CIS affairs, who was harshly criticized by PM Chernomyrdin during the meeting, was fired on Saturday and replaced by Ivan Rybkin. Rybkin will also oversee CIS Affairs, but, it was hastily noted, his role in negotiating Chechen relations does not signal an elevation of Chechnya's status to the level of a Commonwealth partner. (RIA-Novosti, 3 Mar 98)

Also released from government service was the transportation minister Nikolai Tsakh, and the education minister, Vladimir Kinelyov. Tsakh is replaced by Sergei Frank and Kinelyov will be succeeded by his first deputy, Aleksandr Tikhonov. (RIA-Novosti, 2 Mar 98) While it seems unlikely that Tsakh and Kinelyov really represent the "culprits" Yel'tsin intended to identify and hold accountable for Russia's economic difficulties, they do have an interesting
element in common in their employment histories: They both became ministers in the government in January 1996. January 1996 may best be remembered as the month most remaining "reformers" left or were dismissed from government service in the wake of the December 1995 Duma elections, in which the "reform/cenrist" parties fared woefully against a resurgent Communist Party led by Gennadi Zyuganov. January 1996 also marks the only time in his long service that Anatoli Chubais was dismissed from the government.

Lest any officials sense relief in this round of dismissals, both government spokesman Shabdurasulov and presidential spokesman Yastrzhemsbky have stated that more personnel changes may be in the offing. (RIA-Novosti, 3 Mar 98)

**Viktor Mikhailov leaves MinAtom**

In another unexpected announcement, the powerful Minister of Atomic Energy is departing his post. According to the president, Viktor Mikhailov is being transferred to the research sector. (RIA-Novosti, 2 Mar 98) According to the ministry staff, Mikhailov had been "planning retirement," and the decree on his dismissal was initiated by the minister himself. (ITAR-TASS, 2 Mar 98; NEXIS) In either event, Mikhailov's dismissal appeared to take many by surprise.

There has been speculation that Mikhailov's departure is connected with recent (and not-so-recent) allegations of technology transfers to Iran and Iraq. Some have even suggested that Mikhailov was sacrificed as a salve to the Americans in the lead-up to next week's Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission meeting. It would be an unusual and indeed heartening development, if true.

As for Mikhailov himself, his remarks suggest bitter resignation: "It is impossible to work, and especially in the atomic sector, when people don't trust you." (Nezavisimaya gazeta, 3 March 98; NEXIS)
Yevgeni Adamov, the director and chief designer of the Research Institute of Nucleonics, has been selected to replace Mikhailov at MinAtom. Adamov was apparently recommended for the post by Mikhailov. (ITAR-TASS, 4 Mar 98; NEXIS)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By John McDonough

Hungarian visit to build trust but...
Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov's talks with the Hungarian prime minister confirmed their countries' willingness to boost bilateral cooperation. The talks revealed disagreements on the issue of Hungary's accession to NATO, but at the same time Primakov and Horn expressed the hope that these disagreements will not impede mutual efforts to promote trust and dialogue between Russia and Hungary. He admitted that "Hungary's orientation to Euro-Atlantic structures is a fait accompli," but Moscow is still worried by the possibility of NATO's military infrastructure moving to Russian borders. (ITAR-TASS, 1732 GMT, 18 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-049)

Although Primakov asked the journalists not to interpret his visit to Hungary, which is seeking NATO membership, as a "tour of the countries invited to the North Atlantic Alliance," he used the occasion to reaffirm Moscow's opposition to future NATO expansion. Primakov said that Russia continues to be strongly opposed to NATO expansion to the east and considers the admission of any of the ex-Soviet republics, including the Baltic states, to the alliance as "absolutely inadmissible." He also added that one of the main tasks now is to oppose the creation of new deep dividing lines in Europe. (ITAR-TASS, 2037 GMT, 18 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-049)

Development of bilateral relations deemed 'priority'
Primakov's official visit to Greece from 15-17 February marked a new stage in Russian-Greek relations, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesmen Valeri Nesterushkin stressed. "A personal message from Russian President Boris Yel'tsin was conveyed to the Greek head of state," Nesterushkin said. "The conversations held in Athens confirmed that there is national consensus in Greece with regard to the development of friendly relations and comprehensive cooperation with Russia." (ITAR-TASS, 2221 GMT, 19 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-050)

While Primakov was in Greece, an intergovernmental Russo-Cuban commission for trade, economic, scientific and technological cooperation opened its session in Havana. Among the most important projects discussed in the framework of the commission was the construction of a nuclear power plant in Juragua. The first phase of the once "frozen" plant will soon be put into operation. The participants in the session are representatives of the state structures of the two countries and Russian businessmen seriously interested in long-term partnership with Cuba. (ITAR-TASS, 1018 GMT, 20 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-051)

Back in Moscow, attention was focused on Mideast policy. "Russia regards the development of relations with friendly Syria as a priority of its Middle East policy," Yel'tsin said in a message to his Syrian counterpart Hafiz al-Asad. He "confirmed Russia's intention to cooperate with Syria as a key player in the Middle East settlement," a Russian foreign ministry spokesman said in a briefing in Moscow on 22 February. The two sides have signed a memorandum of understanding between the Russian Atomic Energy Ministry and the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission. (Interfax, 1256 GMT, 24 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-055)

The following day, Iran's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kamal Kharrazi, arrived in Moscow. Diplomatic sources said that talks were planned with Primakov and other members of the Russian government on 24-26 February. The Russian diplomat noted that political dialogue between Moscow and Tehran is developing
most successfully. "Relations with Iran are a priority for Russia in the region," a Russian foreign ministry spokesman stated on the eve of the visit (ITAR-TASS World Service, 2154 GMT, 23 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-054) Kharrazi also planned to discuss working out a new legal status for the Caspian Sea. (Interfax, 1323 GMT, 16 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-047)

Duma head in Israel
A Russian State Duma delegation, headed by Chairman Gennadi Seleznev, began a two-day visit to Israel on 22 February. This is the first experience of cooperation between Russia and Israel in the framework of interparliamentary relations, implemented on the Knesset's initiative. During the visit the Russian parliamentarians planned to meet the leadership of the Palestinian National Authority in Gaza to discuss Russia's possible participation in resolving the regional conflict. Also Seleznev planned to meet Prime Minister Netanyahu during the visit. (Radio Rossii Network, 1100 GMT, 22 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-053)

Russian involvement in Iraq situation denied, appreciated
General Yuri Kobaladze denied allegations of Russian surveillance of Iraq weapons inspectors described in an article in the British newspaper, The Times. "This is complete rubbish," the general stressed. "Any sensible person would quite easily find a total lack of logic and common sense in the newspaper article." In the general’s opinion, the absurdity of the situation described in the newspaper is obvious and insulting. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1135 GMT, 13 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-044)

While Russian eyes were, evidently, focused on the Persian Gulf, this reportedly was due to the possible effects conflict would have on Russia. Vladimir Ryzhkov, first deputy speaker of the State Duma, stated his certainty that American attacks on Iraq will prevent Russia from ratifying the START II Treaty. He also commented on two other obstacles to ratification. Ryzhkov said that "in spite of
all the statements by the Americans that they will not press ahead" with the admission of new members to the alliance, "their actual foreign policy contradicts this." He cited the charter signed recently with the Baltic states, and recent US promises to Bulgaria to facilitate its admission to NATO. "The third reason is the prospect of a START III Treaty. Russia is making ratification of START II conditional on the drawing up of specific parameters for START III," Ryzhkov said. (ITAR-TASS, 19 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-050)

Russian intervention did earn gratitude from at least one quarter. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on 23 February thanked Yeltsin and Primakov for their "invaluable role" in the settlement of the Iraqi crisis. Hussein expressed gratitude for the contribution made by Yeltsin and Primakov during his meeting with Russian special envoy Viktor Posuvalyuk. The president also thanked Posuvalyuk for being constantly in Baghdad during the crisis which, the INA news agency said, was caused by the United States. (ITAR-TASS, 1920 GMT, 23 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-054)

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Michael Thurman

POLITICAL PARTIES
Agrarian Party opposes proposal to free land sale
The left-wing Agrarian Party announced its continued opposition to a Kremlin initiative to allow the free sale and ownership of farmland. Party chairman Mikhail Lapshin was responding to a recent statement made by Yeltsin that the Kremlin would try to persuade the "milder opposition" to accept the proposed lifting of restrictions on the sale of land.
Lapshin claims that if the sale of farmland were to be allowed, a "revolutionary upheaval" in the countryside would result. According to Lapshin, a better solution would be to support the farmers -- and the present system.

Clearly the sale of farmland could be organized in such a way as to benefit small- or medium-sized farmholders. This issue is not whether land should or should not be sold; the issue is how Russia wishes to distribute land ownership. The Agrarian Party is quite simply not the party of the individual farmer -- at least at the national level -- it is the party of the agricultural collective and of those administrators who benefit from the status quo. It is unfortunate that the interests of the simple farmer are not represented anywhere (Interfax, 1156 GMT, 2 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-033).

**FEDERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Duma issues statement on US-Baltic partnership charter**

The statement admits that while the signatories are within their right to sign such agreements, due to the realities of history and the need for European stability, Russia remains interested in the relations between one of the world's leading powers and countries bordering it.

The deputies noted the contradictory nature of the charter, which wishes no dividing lines in Europe, while speaking of a further expansion of NATO. The deputies were also annoyed by the timing of the agreement, which came soon after the Baltic states essentially rejected Russia's security guarantees. The statement is also critical of the Baltic-US Charter's concern for human rights, claiming that the rights of ethnic Russians in the Baltic states are continuously being violated.

The exaggerated importance that Russia places on the internal affairs of the Baltic states may come primarily from the states' former status as members of the Soviet Union. But it is also clear that this is perhaps the last area of Europe
where Russia believes it retains a degree of influence. However, judging from the Baltic states' independent actions of late, such influence must be considered to be marginal (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 3 Feb 98, p. 5; FBIS-SOV-98-034)

REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Lebed to run for governor of Russia's Siberian region
A collection of signatures put the leader of the Popular Republican Party, Aleksandr Lebed, on the ballot as a gubernatorial candidate in the Siberian territory of Krasnoyarsk. The elections are scheduled for 26 April.

Lebed is the former secretary of the Russian Security Council. Winning the governorship would provide him with a platform from which to launch the widely rumored candidacy for president. In addition to the title of governor, Lebed would also become a member of the Federation Council in Moscow, creating, presumably, a thorn in Boris Yel'tsin's side. As for the inhabitants of Krasnoyarsk, they must decide if they are willing to accept someone who will most likely be an absentee governor (Interfax, 1602 GMT, 9 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-040)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By CDR Curtis Stevens

Commander discusses Strategic Rocket Forces
The commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces, Colonel General Vladimir Yakovlev, held a Moscow press conference recently and stated the combat capability of his troops remains high. Given the growing obsolescence of his present force and the limited funds for new systems, Yakovlev stressed that there was "no alternative to ratification of START II." (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 20 Feb 98)

In a late January interview, Defense Minister Igor Sergeev announced that comprehensive testing of the Topol-M missile would be complete and that the
facilities of the Topol-M-equipped 104th missile regiment would be operational.
(Flag rodiny, 24 Jan 98; FBIS-SOV-98-043)

**Swedish foreign minister visits Baltic Fleet**
Mrs. Hjelm-Wallen visited the commander of the Baltic Fleet to follow up on President Yel'tsin's announcement concerning the reduction of Russian forces by 40 percent in the Baltic region. Yel'tsin had made the announcement during a visit to Sweden in December. She said Sweden planned to reduce its own forces by 10 percent in the next five years. Although the Baltic Fleet commander did not discuss concrete force reduction steps that would be taken, the Swedish foreign minister nonetheless said she was confident Yel'tsin was serious about making substantial force reductions. (Strazh baltiki, 5 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-049)

**Another officer arrested in Kholodov case**
Vladimir Morozov, a major in the Airborne Troops Special-Purpose Regiment, was arrested on 19 February for involvement in the 1994 murder of journalist Dmitri Kholodov. Colonel Vladimir Kravchuk, chief of intelligence for the airborne troops, had been previously arrested in the case. Investigators also questioned former Defense Minister Pavel Grachev about the murder. (NTV, 20 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-051; Komsomol'skaya pravda, 13-20 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-047)

**Military told to pay electric bills**
The economics ministry has put the military on notice to pay its electric bills. Economics Minister Yakov Urinson said the government would place limits on the amount of energy the defense ministry could receive this year. Last year he said the defense ministry consumed over 10 trillion rubles of electricity, but was only budgeted for R2 trillion and spent only R1.5 trillion. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 16 Feb 98)

**Ukraine to keep last Slava class cruiser**
Ukraine announced it would complete the fourth and last Slava class cruiser. Laid down in 1985 and launched in 1990, the 12,500-ton cruiser was to be named the Admiral Lobov. Work stopped on the ship with the demise of the Soviet Union. A sister ship, Moskva, is being completed for the Russian Black Sea Fleet with financing provided by the city of Moscow. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 23 Feb 98)

In other Russian Navy news, the Frunze Naval Academy in St. Petersburg will be getting its first woman cadet. She will be the only woman in a school of 1500 students. The defense ministry approved her request and Lyudmila Yolshina will become the first female naval cadet in Russian history. No other Russian naval school admits women. (St. Petersburg Times Weekly internet edition, 23 Feb 98)

**Defense ministry goes on-line**
The Russian defense ministry press office announced on 24 February that the ministry had opened an internet web page. Documents relating to military reform as well as military newspapers and journals will be available on the site. (ITAR-TASS, 24 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-055) The article did not list the web page address.

**Newly Independent States: CIS**

**By Mark Jones**

**CIS defense ministers approve plan for future cooperation**
At their recent Minsk meeting, the CIS defense ministers approved a draft plan for military cooperation through the year 2001. According to a press release from the CIS Staff for Coordination of Military Cooperation, the plan covers "all areas of military cooperation," but highlights the further development of the joint air defense system. The council also approved budgets for several joint military programs and reappointed Russian General Viktor Prudnikov as chief of staff of
the headquarters for coordinating CIS military efforts and the chief of the CIS anti-aircraft (air defense) system. (Interfax, 30 Jan 98; FBIS-SOV-98-030 and FBIS-UMA-98-030)

After the meeting, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev proudly announced that the CIS is heading towards a "collective defense space." He then revealed his intentions by making reference to the recently signed Moscow-Minsk defense pact and announcing that "forming a single defense space in the framework of the Russian-Belarusian Union" will be discussed in the future (Interfax, 30 Jan 98; FBIS-UMA-98-030). Provisions of the Russian-Belarusian pact include: a joint defense policy, the organization of joint armed defense, and the unification of the countries' defense legislation. (Belapan, 16 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-047)

General Prudnikov had some comments on the future of Russian and CIS peacekeeping efforts. Prudnikov linked the creation of joint peacekeeping forces to the formation of national armed forces. Commenting that not all national forces are completely developed, he said that once they were, the CIS would move to the "second stage" of military development. In the next stage, member states will be required to designate certain military units to perform CIS peacekeeping duty - thereby creating a CIS common peacekeeping force. Responding to primarily Georgian and Moldovan calls for the establishment of non-Russian-led, NATO-like peacekeeping units, Prudnikov shot back, "If a desire is expressed to recruit outside peacekeepers, that is absolutely wrong." (Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye, No. 5, 6-12 Feb 98; FBIS-UMA-98-043)

Comment

The Russian-Belarusian mutual defense agreement goes way beyond even the 1992 Tashkent Collective Security Treaty. Sergeev's comments point to the obvious -- Russia's long-term strategic goal is to reintegrate all military organizations in the former Soviet space under Moscow's control. As we have pointed out in the past, the preferred method is by formalizing a CIS air defense
system, CIS border troops, and CIS peacekeeping units. These types of formations seem innocuous enough. On the surface they appear to be strictly for defense and peace making. However, they enable Moscow to execute troop movements into other countries, as well as to maintain control of CIS wide command and control systems, communications, intelligence gathering, ground transportation links, and air traffic.

**Foreign ministry stays on message, sort of**

Boris Pastukhov, Russia's first deputy minister of foreign affairs, echoed the official foreign policy statements of President Yel'tsin and Victor Chernomyrdin when, in an interview with Rossiyyskiye vesti, he noted that for the foreign ministry, 1998 is "The Year of the CIS." But he slipped up, referring to the sovereign countries around Russia's border as the "near abroad" -- a term Yel'tsin and Russia's CIS cooperation minister, Anatoli Adamishin, dislike. He did put a spin on the phrase, though. Pastukhov said he uses the term "near abroad" because neighboring countries and their people, are "near to our heart."

(Rossiyyskiye vesti, 10 Feb 98, p. 2; FBIS-SOV-98-051)

In another example of spin control, the Russian foreign ministry now sees the creation of the CIS in 1991 as "an instrument ... conceived for a 'civilized divorce' of the former Union republics." Today, however, it serves as a "certain creative force."

Pastukhov also discussed the armed conflicts occurring within the CIS and, like his friends in the defense ministry, quickly pointed out that "Russia alone carries the burden of their settlement," since Russia's "leading role in peacemaking in post-Soviet space is acknowledged by the international community." Maybe he doesn't consider the UN, EU, OSCE and many other organizations as part of the international community.
UKRAINE

Luzhkov: Sevastopol has not been abandoned

Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov reasserted that the city of Sevastopol must be returned to Russia, citing it as the "front post" of Russia's southern border. (Interfax 1217 GMT, 21 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-052) This was in the wake of his visit to the city on 21 February to present Black Sea sailors with keys to two new apartment blocks (financed from Moscow's coffers) which he promised would not be the last built there. He stressed that he was only a representative of Muscovites, the majority of whom "believe Sevastopol was (illegally) torn from Russia." Luzhkov also protested what he saw as the forced Ukrainization of Crimea's Russian population, via Ukrainian schools, newspapers and street signs. (Obshchaya gazeta, No. 7, 19-25 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-051) Mr. Luzhkov is considered by many to be one of the front-runners in Russia's presidential elections in 2000. He prides himself on his "patriotic, pro-Russian" platform. A UN report refutes his accusations, since currently there only two Ukrainian-language schools in the Crimea, compared to 586 Russian-language schools and fifteen Tatar-Crimean schools. (Jamestown Monitor, 24 Feb 98)

Crimea's and Sevastopol's status as part of Ukraine's territory has yet to be recognized by the Russian Duma, which has yet to ratify the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership Treaty that would demarcate borders.

Currently over 85,000 Russian sailors live in Crimea. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, their citizenship status was in limbo. Under the terms of the Black Sea Fleet arrangement last year, they were supposed to be permitted to choose either Russian or Ukrainian citizenship. It has now been over six months and the issue has still not been resolved, since the Russian government has yet to issue those soldiers who have chosen Russian citizenship the appropriate documents. These soldiers are routinely stopped when they cross the Russian
Separatists in the Crimea are hinting that it might be advantageous to offer Russian soldiers Ukrainian citizenship, permitting them to vote in any referenda on Crimea's status. (Zerkalo Nadeli, 22 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-057)

Crimean parliament agrees to 29 March elections
After many denunciations of President Leonid Kuchma's decree on holding early elections, and the violent tensions that gripped Yalta, members the Crimean parliament passed a resolution on 12 February to hold early elections to the Supreme Council on 29 March, one month before their terms were to end. The parliament finally gave in following threats by the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet to dissolve the organization if members did not concede. (Zerkalo Nedeli, 21 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-057) As a final protest, the Crimean lawmakers filed a motion with the Ukrainian Constitutional Court and sent a second letter to the Council of Europe secretary general.

Comment
The jury is out as to the legality of Kuchma's decree to hold early elections. It will be interesting to see if Constitutional Court will hear the case, though it seems unlikely. On 22 February, the Ukrainian justice ministry issued a statement that it was the Crimean parliamentarians, not President Kuchma, who acted "in breach of the Ukrainian Constitution and law." (Ukrayinske Radio, 0500 GMT, 22 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-053) The question now remains as to whether in such a short period of time Crimea will indeed be ready to hold democratic and fair elections. Many parliamentarians complained that the early date would not allow them to form parties, develop platforms, or support candidates.

In the days following the storming of the Yalta City Council building, quiet seems to have settled over the Crimea. This may be due to Ukrainian interior ministry officials who have stationed over 6,500 police on the peninsula. Since the beginning of February, interior ministry officials reportedly have detained over
677 people suspected of various crimes, as well as initiating investigations of over 7,000 entities, 50 percent of which are private companies. Further investigation will try to determine whether the rate of detentions is due to a rise in crime or governmental harassment. (Zerkalo Nedeli, 21 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-057)

**Ukraine and Russia sign ten-year economic cooperation accord**

On 27 February, at the Kremlin, Presidents Leonid Kuchma and Russian Boris Yeltsin signed an agreement on economic cooperation aimed at "doubling trade turnover between the two countries, which in 1997 totaled $14 billion." (RFE/RL Report, 27 Feb 98) The agreement was an indicator of better relations between the two, which President Kuchma rated at a "B+" level, compared to a grade of "C-" in the past. However, he said that the two countries still face many problems, such as recognizing one another’s borders as detailed in the Russo-Ukrainian friendship treaty.

Mr. Kuchma also expressed reservations about the CIS, saying that "big quantities of paper are wasted to little effect.... Ukraine prefers bilateral ties,...(since they) produce practical fruit." He said that Ukraine supported "preserving" the CIS, but that it was not in favor of "groups of two and four" progressing at different speeds. He said efforts would be better spent forming a free-trade zone. (Interfax, 1745 GMT, 24 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-055)

**BELARUS**

**Belarusian authorities deny signing weapons deal with Iran**

The Washington Post reported on 17 February that, during a trip scheduled by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to Iran on 7 March to inaugurate the opening of a Belarusian embassy, he would sign a deal to send tank engines and other spare parts to the country. The Post's article followed a meeting by the Iranian-Belarusian Economic Commission at the beginning of February, at which increasing trade between the two countries reportedly was discussed. This was
subsequently refuted by Belarusian Deputy Foreign Minister Nina Mazay at a 19 February press conference: "We are not preparing such an agreement and this matter was not discussed." The Post reported that the spare parts would be used to maintain Iran's battalions of Soviet-made tanks. In response, Mikhail Kazlow, chief of the main headquarters of the Belarus Armed Forces, stated that currently Belarus does not even have the level of equipment "stipulated by the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty"; therefore, Belarus had nothing to sell. (Belapan, 1633 GMT, 21 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-052) The article also suggested that the Belarusians were acting as a front for what was indeed a deal between Russia and Iran. (The Washington Post, 17 Feb 98)

In related news, a former KGB colonel, Leanid Rachkov, had been appointed as the new Belarusian Ambassador to Iran. Mr. Rachkov said he looked forward to working in Iran, since "many of our positions are close in both foreign and trade-economic issues." (Svaboda, 4 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-044)

MOLDOVA

Gagauz-Yeri region to hold referendum on new constitution
Deputies in the Gagauz autonomous region of Moldova voted on 16 February to organize a referendum on the question, simultaneously with the Moldovan parliamentary elections on 22 March, whether to adopt a constitution for Gagauz-Yeri.

Regional leader Georgi Tabunshchik and Dimitru Motopan, Moldovan parliamentary chairman, had asked the Gagauz parliament to consider postponing the referendum, since it may "affect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova." (Basapress, 1855 GMT, 17 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-050) Piotr Pashaly, chair of the Gagauz assembly, has sent a draft of the constitution to the Council of Europe for its opinion of the document and its potential ramifications. (RFE/RL Report, 17 Feb 1998)
Russian Duma heeds request of Tiraspol to delay ratifying Moldovan treaty

Russian Duma Speaker Gennadi Seleznev announced on 19 February that the Duma had postponed ratification of the Russian-Moldovan interstate treaty until March. The Treaty on Principles for Interstate Relations was signed and ratified by Moldova in 1990. (ITAR-TASS, 1120 GMT, 19 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-050)

Tiraspol had asked the Duma not to ratify the treaty, but rather to negotiate a new one that recognizes the "new situation" which has since come to pass in the Dniestr region. (RFE/RL Report, 20 Feb 98)