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Electoral planning
While speculation continues over whether President Yel'tsin will attempt to remain in office or in power in some form beyond next year, developments in the Kremlin apparat suggest the main priorities for his administration are maximizing control over upcoming electoral outcomes and, more specifically, preventing the Communists from dominating the next Duma.

In June, President Yel'tsin decreed the creation of a Political Planning Administration, which will apparently focus on developing strategies to promote the campaigns of Kremlin-approved parties and movements and attempt to create favorable conditions for the presidential run of Yel'tsin's yet-to-be-named successor. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 11 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0617 <www.fedworld.gov>) Full details on the administration have not yet been published.

The creation of a new media ministry also suggests Kremlin concern with controlling access for parties and candidates, as well as the quality of coverage during the election. Mikhail Lesin, who played a key role in Yel'tsin's 1996 reelection campaign, has been tapped to head up the new ministry. (NOVYE IZVESTIYA REPORT, 14 Jul 99; <www.russiatoday.com>) The Communist Party (CPRF), if it is not banned, can probably count on its political ads running sometime around 3 a.m. during the election campaigns.

The MVD is also getting involved in "monitoring" the campaigns with the task of preventing the election of "criminal elements." In an interview on NTV (1540
GMT, 24 May 99; BBC World Broadcast, via nexis), MVD Minister Vladimir Rushailo explained his service's role in the process: "We provide information to the electoral commissions on the existence of compromising material on specific candidates, so that preventative measure can be taken at the pre-election stage in line with the law." Rushailo claims the MVD is hoping to close off the option of criminals taking up parliamentary seats to gain immunity from prosecution. Unfortunately, the definition of a criminal is a highly political act in Yel'tsin's Russia.

The issue of campaign financing also got a boost from the apparent deal struck between the head of the Unified Energy System (UES), Anatoli Chubais, and the Kremlin. A new voting rule, supported by the president, will make removing Chubais from his post extremely difficult, and in return Yel'tsin's chief of staff, Voloshin, has been named chairman of the Board of Directors. In addition, former prime minister and Yel'tsin's Kosovo negotiator, Viktor Chernomyrdin, is back at the helm of Gazprom as chairman of the Board of Directors. (RUSSIA TODAY FEATURE REPORT, 7 Jul 99; <www.russiatoday.com>) It also seems likely that changes will be made at Rosvooruzheniye, which is currently headed up by Primakov appointee Grigori Rapota. Following the 1996 campaign, allegations surfaced that Rosvooruzheniye provided significant funding for the president's electoral efforts.

Speculation is also rampant over the president's desire to ban the CPRF. The underlying premise of all the theories in this category is that the apparat will attempt to provoke the CPRF into staging a rowdy demonstration, which will result in its exclusion from the upcoming campaigns. The latest rumor holds that Yel'tsin will order the removal of Lenin's body from its mausoleum and conduct a hasty burial. Should the CPRF remain unprovoked, there is concern that the apparat will simply stage an act of anti-Semitism, blame it on the Communists and ban them as extremists.
Former Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov's return to Moscow from abroad, where he was recuperating from back surgery, has thrown a bit of a monkey wrench in the Kremlin's plans. It appears that Primakov and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov are moving closer to a political alliance that could prove both immensely popular and broad-based. Luzhkov and Primakov met recently, but there has apparently been no formal decision on cooperation. (REUTERS, 13 Jul 99; <www.russiatoday.com>)

GOVERNMENT

New defense appointments
Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin recently announced new appointments in the defense sector, apparently made on the basis of suggestions by Ilya Klebanov, the vice premier in charge of military issues. Zinovi Pak has been named as general director of the Russian Munitions Agency and Vladimir Pospelov will serve as general director of the Shipbuilding Agency. (ITAR-TASS, 15 Jun 99; nexis) Aleksandr Nozdrachev is the new director-general of the government's Agency for Conventional Weapons and Vladimir Simonov was appointed director-general for the agency overseeing Command and Control Systems. It is also noted that Oleg Leonov will head up the Executive Staff of the government's Directorate for Cooperation with International Financial Organizations. (ITAR-TASS, 1558 GMT, 16 Jun 99; nexis)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Chandler Rosenberger and Sarah Miller

'Globalizing' security
As peacekeeping troops were deployed in Kosovo, the Russian foreign ministry stepped up its campaign to bind NATO to international organizations and develop a "European" security system.
Moscow appears to place its greatest hopes in the United Nations. In a meeting with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stressed the importance of financing "restoration in Kosovo and the entire Yugoslavia," despite US insistence that no aid go to "rump Serbia" until Slobodan Milosevic leaves office. Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Annan agreed, a Russian spokesman said, that security and stability in Europe could be best protected if the UN adopted a "multipolar world" model. (INTERFAX, 0852 GMT, 24 Jun 99; FBIS-EEU-1999-0624 <www.fedworld.gov>) Opposition to such a model would only come from "those who want to impose a one-dimensional model on the world," Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said. (INTERFAX, 0857 GMT, 29 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0629 <www.fedworld.gov>)

The foreign ministry released a number of trial balloons about reforms needed to strengthen the UN's hand: Membership on the Security Council might be extended to Germany and other states, or its major operations could be handed over to the G-7 plus Russia and China, to make a new G-9. Only a stronger UN could help "to avoid anarchy in international relations," Ivanov said. The Yugoslav crisis had shown the need to take law into account in international relations. Russia, he added, would join efforts to "return the situation in [sic] a legal aspect." (ITAR-TASS, 1607 GMT, 8 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0708 <www.fedworld.gov>)

Also high on the Russian agenda are new attempts to build a common European security structure, even at the expense of the United States. Proposing the adoption of a new European Security Charter, Ivanov said NATO's "unilateral use of force" had presented Europe with a choice between old divisions and new European unity. "A durable European architecture can be built on common European beginnings," Ivanov said; a charter could "become Europe's political constitution in the 21st century." (INTERFAX, 1556 GMT, 8 Jul 99; FBIS-EEU-1999-0708 <www.fedworld.gov>)
The Russian foreign ministry is so faithful to the "multipolar" doctrine first laid out by Yevgeni Primakov that his removal from high office appears inconsequential. Either the doctrine has sunk in, or the ministry does not anticipate that his absence from power will be permanent. Primakov himself gave the proposed reforms the momentum of a veiled threat. There were two options, Primakov wrote in a Dutch newspaper. The NATO countries would admit "they committed a strategic error by acting the way they did in Kosovo"; the United Nations would then return to "the pedestal from which it was taken down." The alternative, too dark to contemplate, would be that the US continues on its belligerent course by, for example, pursuing the Strategic Defense Initiative. In this case, the most popular candidate for the Russian presidency wrote, his country would "build up its military strength again, despite its economic problems, which would have major consequences for the democratic process today." (ALGEMEEN DAGBLAD, 30 Jun 99, p. 10; FBIS-WEU-1999-0701 <www.fedworld.gov>)

**Hard bargaining with NATO**

Having squeezed into post-war peacekeeping in Kosovo, the Russian government is negotiating hard to leverage changes to the NATO structure that would outlast the operation itself.

Although the status and position of Russian troops had purportedly been settled in talks in June, the US Department of State trusted Russian intentions so little that in early July it asked Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania to close their airspace to Russian transport planes. According to a report in Moskovsky komsomolets, the Russian military had apparently planned to use its surprise June move into Pristina as the first step towards seizing its own sector, but got cold feet at the last minute. (MOSKOVSKY KOMSOMOLETS, 2 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0702 <www.fedworld.gov>) Russian generals working with NATO in Brussels picked up where the commanders had left off -- seeking, for example, a presence in the Italian zone that might expand to become a separate Russian sector. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 6 Jul 99) While talks continued, Russian
bombers participating in military exercises penetrated NATO airspace twice, forcing jets stationed in Iceland and Norway to scramble.

Although Moscow was willing to discuss its work with NATO in the Balkans, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev insisted that all other cooperation depended on NATO's agreeing to act only in consultation with the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Russia would also have to play a greater role in NATO decision making through the Permanent Joint Council. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 9 Jul 99; nexis)

**Playing for keeps**
Throughout talks on deployment of troops, Russian officials stressed that their interests lay in constructing a world order that would put NATO's military at the disposal of international organizations. They were not shy, however, about describing the Russian interests that lay behind their moves. "The Balkans," Ivanov said, "have always been and will remain a region of our strategic and geopolitical interests. Therefore, Russia must ensure stability in the Balkans and safeguard its national interests in this region." (INTERFAX, 0921 GMT, 25 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0625 <www.fedworld.gov>) Russia's use of the "Kosovo conflict" to strengthen its influence over the NATO alliance shows that its leaders understand a connection between stability and their country's interests. It is not that stability is in their interest per se, but rather that they have a great interest in shaping how "stability," in the Balkans and elsewhere, is pursued.

**Russia's expanding Asian dialogue**
Russia's relations with its Asian neighbors are clearly expanding. This is not new; Russia has pursued a policy of multipolarism for several years that has stressed development of relations with Asian states. However, the Kosovo crisis has provided fertile grounds for Russian condemnation of perceived unipolar actions by the US. Meanwhile, Russia has touted its own multipolar policy as the nonviolent, diplomatic option. Not surprisingly, in the wake of Iraq and Kosovo,
Moscow's rhetoric has appealed to many Asian and Middle Eastern states concerned about future NATO escapades that could threaten stability in their regions as well. In this anti-Western context, Russia has begun to reap the benefits of increased economic, political and military ties to several key Asian countries.

Relations with China have constituted the most impressive turnaround for Russia. In March, the two countries expanded their relations to a new "strategic cooperative partnership." Under this agreement, Russia and China have already concluded several diplomatic exchanges as well as economic and military agreements. In June, Chinese Foreign Minister Li Peng met with Russian Federation Council Vice President Oleg Korolev to discuss improving regional cooperation. (XINHUA, 1247 GMT, 22 Jun 99; FBIS-CHI-1999-0623 <www.fedworld.gov>) Also in mid-June, the countries signed a border protocol meant to reduce border violations and Premier Stepashin signed a resolution designed to facilitate trade along the Russian-Chinese border. (ITAR-TASS, 1320 GMT, 1 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0702 <www.fedworld.gov>) Following a visit by China's top general, Zhang Wannian, Russian radio reported Chinese intentions to buy 72 Su-70 aircraft, a lucrative deal for Russia. (RADIO ROSSI, 1000 GMT, 15 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0615 <www.fedworld.gov>)

In bilateral disputes like the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan, Russia has relied upon its "diplomacy first" rhetoric to encourage an Indo-Pakistani dialogue while simultaneously reaping arms sales benefits from India. Russia has long seen bilateral ties, with India and China in particular, as necessary components of its multipolar strategy. Throughout late June and early July, India and Pakistan both approached Russia for help in resolving the issue, but Russia declined a formal mediation role that would require a neutral stance. (PIONEER, 24 Jun 99; FBIS-NEA-1999-0624 <www.fedworld.gov>) Instead, Russia has begun deliveries of anti-aircraft missile launchers and India has expressed interest in purchasing "hundreds of tanks, S-200 PMU anti-aircraft systems, latest

In Southeast Asia, Russia has signed a $115 million contract with Bangladesh for MiG-29 fighter planes while Vietnam has purchased Su-27 fighters and military training at Russian military institutes. (INTERFAX, 1230 GMT, 2 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0626 <www.fedworld.gov>) At a recent meeting in Moscow, the Russian and Vietnamese defense ministers signed a military technical cooperation agreement. (XINHUA, 2101 GMT, 2 Jul 99; FBIS-CHI-1999-0702 <www.fedworld.gov>) Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev promised "to render comprehensive assistance to the Vietnamese friends in the promotion of the military-technical cooperation." In this deal, the political and economic implications of the meeting seem more significant than the military ones, since Russia has sold to Vietnam in the past. According to Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov, the issue of military and arms sales should be approached "politically" since both countries are committed to the same political goal of ensuring peace in the region. (XINHUA, 2101 GMT, 2 Jul 99; FBIS-CHI-1999-0702 <www.fedworld.gov>)

Relations with China, India, Bangladesh and Vietnam are only a few examples of Russia's eastward and southern tilt. As long as multipolarism continues to provide solid economic and political rewards, Russia will remain an eager exponent in expanding Asian relations.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Michael Thurman

POLITICAL PARTIES
Luzhkov's Fatherland party shows internal division

Nothing is certain in politics, especially in Russia. But one of the more stable islands in the party system seemed to be Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov's popularity and his Fatherland party, which he hopes will enter the next Duma and perhaps ride him into the Kremlin in the presidential elections scheduled for next summer. All is not serene within Fatherland, however. One of the party's allies is the Congress of Russian Communities (CRC), initially set up by Krasnoyarsk governor and former presidential aide, Aleksandr Lebed. Its present leader, Leonid Rogozin, has hinted that a split may be in the works. Even so, considering that the CRC is too small to get into the Duma alone, let alone the president's office, Rogozin's recent statements might only be the wail of a child trying to get his parent, in this case Fatherland, to take notice.

Rogozin is angry about two facts, the first being that Luzhkov has managed to move up the date of the mayoral elections to coincide with the Duma elections in December. In an interview, Rogozin suggested that Luzhkov was not concerned with the future welfare of the party but only in himself.

"At the beginning we agreed on different things. We counted on the fact that Luzhkov would be heading Fatherland in the future, and now the situation has changed. I doubt that he can head Fatherland's electoral list [for State Duma elections] if he runs at the same time for Moscow mayor." (NTV, 1200 GMT, 14 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0614 <www.fedworld.gov>)

Rogozin is also annoyed that Luzhkov is talking with the All-Russia political movement about association. Again Rogozin notes that, "the All Russia coalition includes people like [Ingush President Ruslan] Aushev, [Tatar President Mintimer] Shaymiyev, and others. I think these people are very dubious figures for the CRC. They represent the strengthening of Tatarstan or Ingushetia as states within a state. [I do not like] their association with Chechen field
commander] Shamil Basayev, for example, when we think that the proper place for a person like that is hanging from a tree." (Ibid.)

His antipathy toward All-Russia is perhaps less vexing when one considers that the CRC considers itself to be a national-patriotic bloc. It is hard to pin down the exact meaning of "national-patriotism," but it appears to be a largely rudderless form of paranoid xenophobia, complete with a persecution complex stemming from assumptions of Western perfidy with regard to Russia. "National-patriotic" party platforms, such as there are, say little about the economy or how to improve peoples' lives. Instead they opt for anti-Western diatribe that masquerades as policy. It is always easy to blame misery on somebody else.

The All-Russia bloc, by extension, is not a national-patriotic movement, although exactly what it is remains similarly unclear. However, of the many differences between the two movements, in this context the CRC is less opposed to centralized solutions to the country's ills than All-Russia, which is comprised by regional governors. The chaotic state of Russian political ideology makes it difficult to identify clear cleavages around which parties can be seen to organize; they tend rather to be administrative extensions of particular politicians. But the regionalist/centralist division is slowly becoming a recurring feature of Russian political ideology. This is, of course, common if not ubiquitous in every federalized political system, and apparently, even one as malformed as Russia's.

Regardless of Rogozin's choice, Fatherland will most likely succeed or fail without him or his party. In the same interview Rogozin threatens that Moscow Mayor Luzhkov may face a challenger for his job more powerful than former prime minister Sergei Kirienko, who has purportedly announced his intention to run. One wonders if the "swan" of Krasnoyarsk longs to escape his present troubles and fly to the lake of Moscow city politics.

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY
Marshaling support for the upcoming Duma elections

Many observers of Russia's nascent democracy wondered what effect Sergei Stepashin's elevation to prime minister would have on the upcoming Duma and presidential elections considering his close relationship with the Federal Security Service (FSB) and other marshal authorities. It seems that he intends to "oversee" the elections to ensure a "fair" outcome.

Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Vladimir Putin said that "[The elections] must take place in terms defined by the Constitution, in full compliance with the norms of election legislature. They must be free, equal, and democratic." In order to achieve this, the FSB will monitor campaign spending and "dig up information about illegalities." (ITAR-TASS, 1037 GMT, 29 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0629 <www.fedworld.gov>)

It is not immediately clear if the present legislation under which the FSB operates is sufficient to allow this apparent increase in the scope of its investigatory powers, nor, more importantly, if such irregularities are discovered, whether the judiciary is in any way capable of dispatching the cases brought before it. If the past is any guide, "evidence" is ipso facto proof of guilt, and protestations of innocence are, additionally, proof of guilt. The danger lies not only in the potentiality of illegal searches on the part of the FSB but, given the sorry state of the Russian judicial process, a simple mention of "evidence" of guilt discovered by the FSB could cast a troublesome candidate or party out of the elections.

Putin did say that the FSB would not violate human rights in any way and that, "a throwback to the past is out of the question," but all of that remains to be seen. (Ibid.)

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Sarah Miller
Stepashin confident about CIS future

Following the flurry of activity at the beginning of the month (see The NIS Observed, 23 Jun 99), June was a relatively quiet month in CIS relations. At the First World Conference of the Russian Press on 21 June, Premier Sergei Stepashin spoke in exaggerated terms about the future of the CIS. Despite the divisive 4 June Heads of Government meeting in Minsk, Stepashin looked "forward to the future of the CIS with confidence" and was "inspired" by the Heads of Government meeting. However, it is difficult to pinpoint the source of his inspiration, since the heads of government were unable to make any substantive headway on the main issue -- the Free Trade Zone (FTZ). (ITAR-TASS, 0810 GMT, 21 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1000-0621 <www.fedworld.gov>)

The current FTZ stumbling block is the introduction of WTO standards in the CIS. At the Third Petersburg Economic Forum held in mid-May, CIS Executive Chairman Yuri Yarov supported the introduction of WTO standards in order to clean up economic practices and facilitate implementation of the FTZ. In contrast, the chairman of the Customs Union Integration Committee, Nigmatzhan Isingarin, argued against WTO standards, which he fears would interfere with FTZ implementation. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 19 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0618 <www.fedworld.gov>) Although this concern may be justified within the Customs Union -- WTO standards would eliminate preferential treatment currently enjoyed by Customs Union members -- it is, however, also plausible that the standards may provide precisely the mechanism needed to standardize economic practices among all CIS members.

Russia’s strategic concerns focus on Western and ethnic threat in CIS

On the fifth anniversary of the CIS peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia, the Georgian government announced that the Russian peacekeeping forces serve no purpose since they lack a mandate, have not ensured the safe return of refugees and have not promoted a political settlement in the conflict. (ITAR-
Georgia has further demanded that the peacekeeping forces be deployed as far as the Ghalidzga River under international, vice Russian, control. This requirement is proving to be disconcerting to Abkhazians and Russians in the wake of NATO actions in Kosovo, and Georgia's participation in the West-oriented GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova) group. At a meeting of Russian defense officials, President Boris Yel'tsin noted that the "threat of major military aggression against Russia remains the realm of theory, but the danger of regional conflicts exists." (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 7 Jul 99) Clearly, an even worse scenario would be a regional conflict escalated by Western involvement; however, Yel'tsin says, this remains in the realm of theory.

In an apparent response to the theoretical Western threat, Russia and Belarus conducted a week-long strategic security exercise -- ironically named West-99 -- beginning on 21 June. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 23 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-99-0623 <www.fedworld.gov>) Despite Russian assurances to the contrary, the exercises -- like the spring air defense exercises in Armenia aimed at repelling an enemy flying out of bases in Georgia or Azerbaijan -- clearly posited a Western aggressor. Interestingly, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine -- all of whom opted out of the CIS Collective Security Treaty -- have expressed interest in NATO and house regional hotbeds within their borders.

Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE
Pressure, pressure, pressure
The Chernobyl saga continued this week, as German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder arrived in Kyiv in an attempt "to persuade the Ukrainian government to consider non-nuclear alternatives" to completing the construction of two new
reactors. Ukraine has said that, until these reactors are completed and begin supplying energy, Chernobyl will continue to run. In order to facilitate Chernobyl's closure, the G-7 five years ago promised $1.2 billion in loans to assist in the completion of these reactors, one each at the Rivne and Khmelnitsky plants. However, as discussed in the previous NIS Observed, G-7 countries have repeatedly delayed the funding. In fact, just days before the money was finally to be allocated last month, the German Bundestag, at the behest of the Greens, voted against the loan, and financing was postponed again. Ukraine responded by threatening to keep Chernobyl open indefinitely. (See NIS Observed, 23 Jun 99.)

Last week, both Schroeder and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma were more conciliatory than they had been in recent days, but they remained at an impasse. After their meetings, Kuchma said he would "examine" all German proposals, but emphasized his belief that, "Nuclear energy is the most rational solution because it is the cheapest." (FINANCIAL TIMES, 10 Jul 99, p. 2; nexis, and AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1402 GMT, 9 Jul 99; nexis)

Meanwhile, Ukraine came under fire from various other sources. Greenpeace representatives arrived in Kyiv to contribute their opinion. The group's energy expert, Tobias Muenchmeyer, proposed that Ukraine build a natural gas plant, since it "would be cheaper and less dangerous to the environment." AP reported that "Kuchma rejected Greenpeace's proposal immediately Tuesday, but did not say why." (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 0552 EDT, 6 Jul 99; Russia Today)

I wonder why. Could it be because Russia has announced that it needs to begin collecting its $1 billion gas and oil debt, and Turkmenistan is insisting that Ukraine actually pay something before any more gas is supplied to the country? Regardless, such minor details did not deter London's Financial Times newspaper, which carried an editorial suggesting, "It is time to reconsider the nuclear option in Ukraine." The paper said, "Gas-fired power stations would be
much cheaper to build, although more expensive to operate in the long-term. But by then, Ukraine will hopefully be more prosperous." (FINANCIAL TIMES, 10 Jul 99, p. 15; nexis) No doubt, Mr. Kuchma found that a convincing argument.

Germany's Greens have recently abandoned the gas idea, and suggested "modernization" of Ukraine's coal-fired plants. Coal? Why not? Ukraine hasn't had any problems in that industry lately, after all.

Of a poll and Poles
President Kuchma may have had to deal with a storm of controversy over Ukraine's nuclear reactors, but he had some excellent news from two areas: an opinion poll, and his Polish summit.

According to a new presidential election poll conducted by the Sotsis-Gallup Company, Kuchma is now significantly ahead in the election race, which will be decided on 31 October. It is the first time a poll conducted by Sotsis-Gallup has shown Kuchma in front of his nearest opponent, Progressive Socialist Party leader Natalya Vitrenko.

Just over 24 percent of those surveyed (1,509 Ukrainians over 18 years old) said they would vote for Kuchma, compared to 12 percent for Vitrenko. That marks a dramatic decrease in support for Vitrenko, and a significant increase for Kuchma. In previous Sotsis-Gallup surveys, both candidates were virtually tied. Kuchma garnered 19 percent, 17 percent and 18 percent support in March, April and May, respectively, while Vitrenko was supported by 21 percent, 19 percent and 21 percent of the respondents during those same months. (INTERFAX, 1633 GMT, 22 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0624 <www.fedworld.gov>)

It appears that Kuchma recently has been successful in using the power of incumbency to his advantage. From his activity concerning Kosovo to a slew of
newly signed decrees, Kuchma has taken over the television airways. All Vitrenko appears to be able to do at the moment is watch.

One of the presidential activities she undoubtedly viewed with interest was Kuchma’s summit with Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski. The two countries appear now to have moved from a period of rapprochement to actual alliance.

During the last two years, Ukraine and Poland have solidified economic, military, and social agreements, dealing with everything from the re-establishment of the Silk Route to a joint peacekeeping battalion to language schools. Now, the countries are creating ties between local regions, cities and towns. During their 24 June summit, Kuchma and Kwasniewski signed "four declarations on cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian local government bodies." Kwasniewski called it "one of the major Central European events recently." (PAP Newswire, 24 Jun 99; nexis) And, it should be noted, it is one of the only foreign policy successes of President Kuchma recently. Rebuffed, albeit gently, by NATO, and attempting not to be drawn completely back into the Russian sphere of influence, Kuchma has turned to his neighbors. Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk recently outlined Ukraine’s current foreign policy plan. According to Tarasyuk, the policy involves "unity and reconciliation with Poland ... traditionally friendly and warm relations with Hungary, a search for compromises and active regional cooperation with Romania and Moldova, a long-time partnership with Turkey, ... new prospects with Slovakia, ... [and] strategic partnership with Russia." With the success of the latest summit, it appears they've already reached their first goal.

BELARUS
One nation, under Yel'tsin?
He was patient, but he has finally had enough. Alyaksandr Lukashenka is not going to take it anymore. On 2 July, Lukashenka told Russia what he really
thought of it, and threatened to do the unthinkable: to befriend the West. Yes, the West. The man who just weeks ago accused NATO of planning to invade his country has decided that, since the invasion seems to have been delayed, he might just want to be friends.

Well, not quite friends. But, during a meeting of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Union of Russia and Belarus, Lukashenka explained that, if Russia doesn't give him what he wants, he's turning to the West. What does he want? The long-promised, but unrealized, union, of course.

"Do you think that I will keep my country in uncertainty for more than five years? It looks like Russia does not need us," he exclaimed. "We reach out our hand and a stone is placed in it. At the same time we have spoiled our relations with the West. . . . I have instructed the Foreign Ministry to maintain the most friendly and close relations with all our neighbors, including Western states. We have made a gross mistake here." He finished, with a dramatic flourish, "Come to a decision finally! Russia should finally determine what it wants." (NTV, 1200 GMT, 2 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0702 <www.fedworld.gov>)

Russia, which has spent all of 1999 openly back-stepping after signing the Declaration on the Union of Russia and Belarus in December 1998, responded quickly and unexpectedly. "The treaty with Byelorussia [sic] is ready. All will be decided within a month," Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin said following a meeting with Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin was more cautious. "If President of Byelorussia Alexandr Lukashenka agrees to the treaty, we shall gradually move on and see where it will take us," he said. (ITAR-TASS, 5 Jul 99; nexis) Later Stepashin claimed, "The treaty may be signed as early as this autumn." (NTV, 1200 GMT, 7 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0707 <www.fedworld.gov>)

All this talk about the signing of the treaty does not deal with what is actually in the document, however. The only concrete proposal has been the suggestion
that the union have a single currency. Shortly after his meeting with Yel'tsin, Stepashin proposed that the Russian ruble be that currency. Given the condition of its own currency, Belarus quickly agreed. All other details are still to be decided.

Now that Russia seems to be moving forward, Lukashenka is once again back in the fold. He is also happy to offer his services as president of the union. That is, if Boris Yel'tsin does not take that position. With Yel'tsin’s term ending, the Union Treaty couldn't come at a better time. Might Yel'tsin have found his way out? Would Lukashenka's ego allow it? It's true that there is currently no provision in the unification documentation for a president of the union. But that can easily be rectified, if both sides want it to be. It's also true that Yel'tsin has denied wanting the position, and Yevgeny Seleznev has denied that it is available. But what will they say tomorrow? With all due deference to Mr. Lukashenka, could Russia have been responding to more than his threats when it put the treaty on the fast track? Stranger things have happened. While union president is not a probable scenario for Yel'tsin, he is no doubt happy to have the option available, if necessary, for June of 2000.

MOLDOVA

Relations with Bulgaria on the track to nowhere

Moldovans certainly know how to hold a grudge. In October 1998, when Moldova decided to absorb the largely Bulgarian country of Taraclia into a larger county where Bulgarians would become a minority, the Bulgar community threatened unrest. At the time, the Bulgarian ambassador to Moldova, Petar Vodenski, suggested that, if the parliament dissolved Taraclia, Bulgarians may want to become part of the Transdniestr region. (For further background, see Editorial Digest, 4 Nov 98.) When all was finished, and Taraclia was dissolved, the ambassador's threats turned out to be more talk than action.
However, the Moldovan parliament this month took its own action when it refused to ratify a treaty that would allow Bulgaria to transport nuclear waste by rail through Moldova on the way to Russia. That treaty has already been ratified by Romania, Ukraine and Russia, and would result in payments to Moldova totaling at least $300,000 per year. The parliament seems to have had other considerations. Deputy Speaker Valeriu Matei publicly objected to ratifying a treaty favorable to a country that interferes with Moldova's internal business. (BASAPRESS, 1700 GMT, 24 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0624 <www.fedworld.gov> and INTERFAX, 8 Jul 99; nexis) The Bulgarian parliament also decided recently to introduce visas for Moldovan citizens.

Deputy Prime Minister Nicolae Andronic, who is in favor of the treaty, warned that it must be ratified, or the situation "will inevitably affect our ties with Bulgaria." (BASAPRESS, 1700 GMT, 24 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0624 <www.fedworld.gov>) It would seem that those "ties" are already quite unbound.

Newly Independent States: Transcaucasia

By Miriam Lanskoy

CHECHNYA
Why isn't Maskhadov retaliating?
Reading some recent news reports, one experiences a very unpleasant deja vu. In June Russia closed 50 border checkpoints with Chechnya as Chechen fighters attacked outposts of the Russian interior ministry in Dagestan. On 30 June ITAR-TASS broadcast an announcement from the Russian Ministry of Ethnic Policy that thousands of Russian residents of Chechnya who lack legal protection under Shariah law have fallen victim to violent crime. (1235 GMT, 30 Jun 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts via nexis) Two days later, the ministry called for a systematic evacuation of Russians from Chechnya. (RADIOSTANTSIYA EKHO MOSKVY, 0900 GMT, 2 Jul 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via nexis)
The Russian prime minister and the heads of the power ministries talk of achieving a position of strength, adopting tough action, and annihilating bandits. Moscow’s current rhetoric echoes the pronouncements of the Summer and Fall of 1994 and has already culminated in two sets of retaliatory airstrikes in May and June and one instance of preemptive airstrikes on 5 July. Some have speculated about the possibility that the Chechens may retaliate against Russian provocative behavior, igniting another full-scale war.

So why aren't Basaev and Raduev threatening to bring the war to Russian towns? Why hasn't Maskhadov taken to the airwaves to condemn Russian aggression and brandish the specter of holy war raging across the entire North Caucasus? On the contrary, Maskhadov's spokesman, Mairbek Vachagaev, said that these aggressive actions constitute Russia's pre-negotiation posturing aimed at convincing Maskhadov to make serious concessions at his upcoming meeting with President Boris Yeltsin. This implies that preparation for this long-awaited event continues despite the rhetorical flourishes. It further suggests that official Dzhokar-gala understands the motivations behind the airstrikes. Vachagaev's statement indicates that the Chechen authorities condemn the strikes and threaten retaliation (albeit indirectly -- the government may not prove capable of restraining some unruly elements) but, significantly, they understand the underlying motivations behind Russia's seemingly bellicose behavior.

(INTERFAX, 1137 GMT, 4 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0704 <www.fedworld.gov>)

Several new factors support the proposition, suggested in the 23 June issue of The Analytical Review, that Stepashin may have secured Maskhadov's support for the strikes against units loyal to the field commanders Khattab and Shamil Basaev. Both of them operate in the border region, whence they have antagonized Moscow by leading raids into Russian territory and exhibited independence from Ichkeria's central authorities.
In fact, in a 3 July speech to the Federation Council, Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo indicated that Maskhadov was consulted about the strikes:

"We discussed this problem with the [Chechen President] Aslan Alievich [Maskhadov] and the Chechen Interior minister. You see it is quite difficult for them to fight crime. (...) They are asking us for help and we will help them."
(RADIOSTANTSIIYA EKHO MOSKVIY, 1200 GMT, 3 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0703 <www.fedworld.gov>)

Two days later, Rushailo made good on his promise by bombing a unit of roughly 150 to 200 Chechen fighters at an undisclosed location in the border region between Chechnya and Dagestan. Two days after that, he played host for a delegation from Ichkeria's interior ministry and signed two protocols on collegial relations between the investigative and cadre departments of the Russian and Chechen ministries. (ITAR-TASS, 7 Jul 99; via nexis)

Too early for champagne toast

Could it be that the Russian interior ministry has strengthened Maskhadov's hand against his rivals in return for substantial concessions at the upcoming summit with the Russian president? If true, this scenario raises vexing questions.

Has Moscow finally adopted a coherent policy in the region? This seems unlikely. In fact, on 6 July Izvestia reported that the military "openly sabotaged" Rushailo's strategy earlier this Spring. The contradictions between the power ministries must impair their ability to carry out operations and effect policies.

Maskhadov must be terribly alienated from Chechen society to strike so Faustian a bargain. Over the last year his vulnerability has increased as more commanders proved insubordinate and more politicians left the government. In fact, he has had to reorganize the government repeatedly to rout his competitors. On one occasion in the Spring he imposed a state of emergency in Grozny after
units loyal to the government clashed with opposition units. Does this man command enough credibility to convince others to accept Russian terms? Will he posses the military might to impose such terms?

We should not lose sight of the fact that Dudaev also had powerful rivals and also lacked popularity. Yet, the Chechens rallied around him as soon as the tanks rolled. On countless occasions during the war analysts predicted that individual field commanders in remote locations cut off from the central command would make separate deals with the invader. Not one of them ever did. During the presidential election and every governmental restructuring over the last two years some expected Chechnya to descend into civil war. Despite all the devastation and disillusionment in the post-war society, that has not happened. If Maskhadov gets too close to the Russians, however, the Chechens may well unite behind a far less conciliatory figure.

Time and time again divide-and-conquer tactics have led to catastrophe in this region. If Stepashin thinks that he can win advantageous terms by boosting the fortunes of an unpopular president, he may again be courting disaster in Chechnya.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

UZBEKISTAN
Relations with Turkey tainted by Uzbek regime's fear of opposition
The Uzbek government's ongoing campaign against domestic secular and Muslim opposition movements has made the leap onto the international arena by precipitating a crisis in Uzbek-Turkish relations. President Karimov and his administration have apparently come to believe that Turkey bears some responsibility for the 16 February bomb attacks in Tashkent, which Uzbek
authorities view primarily as an attempt to assassinate the Uzbek president. The main facts that led Uzbek officials to draw this conclusion appear to be the Turkish government's initial hesitation in granting Uzbekistan's extradition request for two Uzbek citizens suspected of involvement in the bombings; Turkey's refusal to extradite a third suspect in the bombings, on the grounds that he is a Turkish citizen (Turkish law prohibits the extradition of Turkish citizens to foreign countries' judicial and investigative authorities); and the Turkish government's willingness to grant asylum to Muhammad Solih, chairman of Uzbekistan's Erk Party (an outlawed opposition party) for a number of years. After Uzbek authorities accused Mr. Solih of being one of the main organizers of the bomb attacks, Turkey requested that he leave the country, but this action apparently did little to appease the Uzbek government. (AP WORLDSTREAM, 0910 EDT, 16 Jun 99; nexis)

Turkish recalled its ambassador to Uzbekistan, Umur Apaydin, on 15 June, after the Uzbek government began closing Turkish schools and madrasas (religious schools) in Uzbekistan and ordered all Uzbek students studying at Turkish universities to return home, ostensibly to protect them from Turkish Muslim extremist influences. A number of Turkish businessmen working in Uzbekistan have also been accused of supporting the Uzbek opposition movements which allegedly carried out the bombings in Tashkent. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 1530 GMT, 16 Jun 99; BBC Worldwide Monitoring, via nexis)

Despite repeated assurances by the Turkish foreign ministry and Prime Minister Ecevit himself that Turkey is eager to reestablish good relations with the Uzbek government, President Karimov's administration has persisted in portraying Turkey as a propagator of Muslim extremism in Uzbekistan. Uzbek authorities allege that both Turkish government officials and private entrepreneurs are seeking to indoctrinate Uzbekistan's youth with Muslim fundamentalist ideology. ('OZBEKISTON OVOZI', 6 Jul 99; BBC Worldwide Monitoring, via nexis) Uzbek
The Uzbek government's recent belligerence toward Turkey and its vilification of Turkish businessmen and school administrators who work in Uzbekistan are not easy to explain. For the most part, the two countries have enjoyed cordial relations and Turkey has assisted in the creation of numerous joint ventures in Uzbekistan. At the same time, however, the Turkish government has permitted Uzbek opposition members from both Birlik and Erk (the two main secular opposition movements, both of which have been banned) to seek at least temporary refuge in Turkey. This brought about a short-term chill in Uzbek-Turkish relations in 1994. The current situation is considerably worse, with the Uzbek government so far having rejected all of Turkey's attempts at reconciliation.

President Karimov's steadfast refusal to mitigate his anti-Turkish rhetoric is beginning to seem somewhat irrational, perhaps even bordering on the paranoid. Of all the Middle Eastern Muslim countries, Turkey is the most secularized; both the Turkish government and military are known for their deep suspicion of Muslim political movements, moderate or otherwise. Furthermore, Turkey has only allowed members of Uzbekistan's secular opposition to seek asylum within its borders, and after Muhammad Solih became implicated in the Tashkent bomb attacks, he was asked to leave the country. Both Prime Minister Ecevit and President Suleiman Demirel have issued repeated assurances that Turkey will
not permit the members of any groups that pose a threat to Uzbekistan to reside on Turkish soil or receive any support whatsoever from the Turkish government. (ANATOLIA, 1208 GMT, 16 Jun 99; FBIS-WEU-1999-0616 <www.fedworld.gov>)

Thus, at this point, there seems to be little else that the Turkish government can do, but wait for President Karimov's administration to reestablish normal bilateral relations. That the Uzbek foreign ministry has not yet responded to Turkey's numerous attempts to resolve the conflict is becoming somewhat mystifying. It is clearly the Uzbek government that stands to lose the most in economic benefits if the two countries permanently break off relations. Turkey has also often acted as an important link between Uzbekistan and the West. With Uzbekistan's recent entry into the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) alliance (now GUUAM), which had been able to form a very cordial relationship with Turkey, friction between the Uzbek and Turkish governments has become even less desirable. It is not entirely inconceivable that, if Uzbekistan's hostility toward Turkey continues, Turkish leaders' support for the GUUAM alliance will begin to waver, as well. Perhaps it is time for President Karimov to temper his rhetoric on anti-Uzbek conspiracies and to consider the wisdom of accusing both his allies and his enemies of hatching plots against his government before he antagonizes his remaining supporters both at home and abroad.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States
By Kate Miller

Discord prevents productive discussion on minorities' issues
Minority issues once again plagued the Baltic states, but the unresolved conflict originated not in the east this time, but in the southwest. A meeting of the joint Polish-Lithuanian National Minority Council was scheduled for the end of June to calm the roiling relations of ethnic groups outside national boundaries, but few problems were resolved. In fact, the level of discord was so high, a pre-meeting
meeting of the council could not be held due to mutual disagreement. According to Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, the Polish minority in Lithuania is concerned about Lithuania's reform of its administrative and territorial system, the reinstatement of land property rights, the issue of spelling names and surnames, secondary education, and language exams. Lithuanian Prime Minister Rolandas Paksas said the Lithuanian side wanted to include on the agenda discussion of Polish education reform and the effects it has had on the Lithuanian minority, the legal status of the Lithuanian minority, financing a community center and customs post, and the publication of Lithuanian textbooks. (Baltic News Service, hereafter "BNS," DAILY REPORT, 1800 GMT, 18 Jun 99) The actual meeting of the council in Warsaw, originally planned to last one day, extended to two days, and five concerns were discussed. According to Remigijus Motuzas, director of the Lithuanian Regional Problems and National Minorities Department, the two countries could not reach agreement on the border-crossing station or on the spelling of names in official documents. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 1 Jul 99)

Adding oil to the waters was the publication of a booklet by the Polish charity organization Humanitarian Action, which claimed the Polish minority was "the most impoverished and illiterate" segment of Lithuanian society, warned that most Polish elementary schools would be closed in the wake of educational reform, and charged that the price of a single Polish textbook is the same as an entire set of books for a Lithuanian school. When interviewed by Baltic News Service, Alexandra Rezumowa, the booklet's author, said she visits Lithuania at least every two months and could report that Lithuanian organizations were very effective. "However, sharpening the corners of such situation helps attract more patrons and sponsors," she said. (DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 24 Jun 99)

Meanwhile, the two countries which habitually receive complaints from Russia on the treatment of ethnic minorities report that, domestically at least, integration is increasingly perceived to be proceeding smoothly. From Estonia come two
separate reports of practical attempts at integration. Education Minister Tonis Lukas and Margus Kottise, director of the Narva education department, agreed to establish a school with classes to be held entirely in Estonian for Russian children in the city. Under the initial plan the new school will open on 1 September 2001. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1800 GMT, 28 Jun 99) Moreover, it is not only the young who are receiving attention and education with the goal of integration. Over 1,000 employees of the Estonia Railway Company recently completed a three-year program in Estonian and have obtained the required proficiency in the language. Students in the course, sponsored by Norway, included Russian-speaking employees from all positions in the company. A similar teaching effort, on a smaller scale, is scheduled to begin in the Autumn. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 21 Jun 99) On the international front, Foreign Minister Toomas Hendrik Ilves reassured OSCE High Commissioner Max van der Stoel that language law amendments which establish requirements about the minimum level of Estonian fluency for public servants, employees and individual entrepreneurs would indeed conform to international standards, and in particular would follow European Union standards. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 11 Jun 99)

In Latvia, a poll conducted by SKDS in May showed that nearly one-half of the country's residents believe integration is proceeding well; not surprisingly, however, that perception differs between ethnic Latvians and persons of other nationalities. Among Latvians, 53.6 percent believe the process is going smoothly, while 38.1 percent of other nationalities agree with that assessment. Nearly one-half (48.9 percent) of other nationalities and one-third (32.8 percent) of Latvians see the integration process as unsuccessful. According to the poll, education levels also reflected differences in perception: Persons with higher and secondary education saw more success in the process (46.2 percent and 48.8 percent, respectively), while 31.3 percent of respondents with basic education believed integration was successful. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 21 Jun 99) That view does not extend beyond Latvia's borders, apparently. The British
Socialist representative to the Council of Europe, Terry Davis, objected to a proposal to cease monitoring Latvia, citing the progress still needed in the integration of non-citizens. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 24 Jun 99) The following day, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov reiterated his oft-cited claim that Estonia and Latvia continue to violate the human rights of their Russian-speaking population. (BNS, 0859 GMT, 25 Jun 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0626 <www.fedworld.gov>) He hadn't counted on his charges being refuted by a professional linguist or dismissed by an international court. In a live television show aired by ORT in Russia, Latvia's new President Vaira Vike-Freiberga denied that human rights were at issue. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1800 GMT, 30 Jun 99) "The Russian language speakers can take their place within Latvia's community. The only thing we ask of them is to learn the state language," Vike-Freiberga said. "[It's] a fundamental courtesy," she added.

While Russia has been the loudest voice charging human rights abuses in the Baltic countries, official figures from Strasbourg draw a different picture. Of the three Baltic states, Lithuania leads in the number of complaints sent to the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg. Of 167 complaints sent from Lithuania, 43 were filed for review. A total of 71 complaints were received from Latvia, with 15 applications filed for review. From Estonia, 66 complaints were received, and 13 were filed for review. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 22 Jun 99)

LATVIA

Language law continues to incite dialogue

A change of heart, or political pressure, caused the Saeima parliamentary commission to step up its consideration and advancement of the language law (earlier reported to be held off until the next parliamentary session began in August), and the full parliament scheduled an extraordinary session on 8 July for a final reading of the bill. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 29 Jun 99) Foreign Minister Valdis Birkavs took pains to reassure journalists inquiring about external
pressure that recent telephone conversations between Birkavs, Stoel and EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Hans van den Broek revolved around the commissioners' interest in how the current draft was worded, and involved no attempts to force change. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 30 Jun 99) Birkavs' public statement was clearly an attempt to calm the ruffled feathers of MPs who had cried "foul" over international intrusion in Latvia's domestic affairs. Although warnings from the international community continue to be heard -- leaders of EU member states meeting at an economic forum in Salzburg told PM Vilis Kristopans that the state language law is the main obstacle to the start of membership talks with Latvia (RADIO RIGA NETWORK, 0900 GMT, 3 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0703 <www.fedworld.gov>) -- on 8 July the Saeima passed the law in the third reading, with a vote of 73-16, with an interesting coalition of supporters: The People's Party, For Fatherland and Freedom, Latvia's Way, and the Social Democratic Workers Party all supported the bill. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 9 Jul 99) It is now up to newly inaugurated President Vaira Vike-Freiberga to promulgate the legislation.

Everything's new again
While the election of a new president in Lithuania brought some confusion as to procedures for the existing prime minister and government (should there be a mass resignation, followed by presidential re-appointment?), there was no such discussion following the 17 June election of Vaira Vike-Freiberga as Latvia's new president. Prime Minister Vilis Kristopans, who regularly assured the country that there was no political crisis, did not rush in with a resignation for form's sake. Alas, not everyone in the government agreed with Kristopans' reassurances: While the prime minister was attending an economic forum in Salzburg, the For the Fatherland and Freedom party, part of the ruling coalition, signed a cooperation agreement with the leading opposition, the People's Party, which just so happens to have remained the most popular party in Latvia since the elections eight months ago. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 1 Jul 99) Citing the defection of the coalition partner, Kristopans announced he would resign
(INTERFAX, 0648 GMT, 5 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0705 <www.fedworld.gov>), leading to the possibility that a stronger government can be formed. The announcement by People's Party leader Andris Skele that his party could not work with the Social Democrats had precluded a coalition agreement many months ago (BNS, 1816 GMT, 26 Nov 98; FBIS-SOV-98-330 <www.fedworld.gov>), resulting in the weaker coalition led by Kristopans. Skele now reports that the People's Party is ready to participate in a new government together with the Social Democrats in order to overcome the present crisis. "The current situation might call for unusual solutions," Skele said. (BNS, 1759 GMT, 5 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0705 <www.fedworld.gov>)

LITHUANIA
How the West wasn't won over
Russian military war games titled "West '99" held near the Lithuanian border under the leadership of Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev startled Lithuanian officials, who said they heard about the maneuvers from the media, not from their Russian counterparts. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Avdeev classified the war games as "an ordinary drill," although they featured an attack from the West and a counterattack to restored territorial integrity by Russia and its allies (here, Belarus). (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1800 GMT, 15 Jun 99) Lithuanian Seimas Speaker Vytautas Landsbergis saw nothing "ordinary" in the exercises, which he termed instead "a gesture of a psychological cold war." "This is a rather audacious political move," Landsbergis said. "The aim of the military exercises is Russia and its allies getting ready for winning back the territories by military force," he added. Adding credence to Landsbergis' assessment was a report by Kommersant-Daily newspaper, which described the military exercise of Russian and Belarusian troops as a simulated conflict between Russia and NATO over the Baltic states. Because the scenario of the exercise was confidential, the newspaper reported, information on the catalyst for action was unavailable. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 22 Jun 99) Given Baltic history -- as well as the success of recent audacious moves by Russia (e.g., taking over
the airport at Pristina) -- such a scenario is destined to raise at least hackles, if not arms.

After Lithuania reproached Russia for its failure to provide advance notification of the exercises, the official response from Moscow was less assuaging than Avdeev's earlier comments. The Lithuanian foreign ministry voiced the expectation that "in the future Russia will follow the Vienna Convention requiring a 42-day notice to neighboring states about any activity with more than 9,000 troops involved." Moscow's response: Russia didn't have to inform Lithuania about the maneuvers in advance. "The total number of Russian federation's military units which attended the session, West '99, is far from the limit provided for in the Vienna document of 1994," according to a press release of the Russian Embassy in Lithuania. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 29 Jun 99) So much for hopes of good neighborly relations. Days later, Lithuanian border guards stopped 16 members of the Russian military from entering the country when they failed to produce a permit for military transit. (BNS, 1020 GMT, 1 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0701 <www.fedworld.gov>)

While not directly linked to the war games, the action resulted from an alertness of Lithuanian border guards that is not unwarranted. The mood in at least some Russian circles concerning the West '99 games and Moscow's moves to push the NATO envelope by sending bomber planes farther westward than required by military exercises can best be described as "gleeful." In a radio interview, Aleksandr Plyushchev, chairman of the State Duma's Committee on Defense, happily recounted that part of the exercise involved the training launch of cruise missiles which, although empty for the exercise, were capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Moreover, he said, "the Americans virtually missed the flight by our two Tu-160 planes and only when the second pair of Tu-95 planes went past did they get their act together, as it were, and begin accompanying the planes to observe them." (RADIOSTANTSIYA EKHO MOSKVY, 1235 GMT, 2 Jul 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0702 <www.fedworld.gov>)
Ignalina's future still uncertain
Discussions about the safety of the Chernobyl-type reactors once more brought Lithuania's Ignalina nuclear power plant to international attention, and the responses have been, well, confusing. A report presented at a week-long conference sponsored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) welcomed progress made concerning safety issues at East European nuclear power plants, but noted particular concern about the extant RMBK-type reactors (the type responsible for the Chernobyl disaster). Included in the list was Ignalina. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1642 GMT, 18 Jun 99; FBIS-WEU-19999-0618 <www.fedworld.gov>) While the European Union has brought pressure to bear on Lithuania to schedule specific dates for the plant's closure, a subsequent visit by IAEA Director General Mohamed El-Baradei brought glowing reports of existing procedures. "The safety standards of running the plant are high," he said at the end of his inspection tour. (BNS DAILY REPORT, 1000 GMT, 28 Jun 99) However, the IAEA director noted that his report and recommendations would only be considered advisory, not binding, for a situation that must be resolved by Lithuania and the EU.