Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Putin provides unsettling answers

In a series of recent interviews leading up to the 26 March elections, acting President Vladimir Putin has attempted to reassure the West that a Russia under his stewardship will be an engaged and responsible member of the international community. His efforts to dampen Western criticism of the brutal Chechen war have become more nuanced and tempered to his international audience. In a BBC interview with David Frost, Putin emphasized the Russian military's alleged attempts to minimize civilian casualties and compared the Chechen fighters to "nazi criminals." (ITAR-TASS, 1522 GMT, 6 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0307, via World News Connection)

His comments and recollection of his past in a Kommersant interview (10 Mar 00; Agency WPS, via lexis-nexis), highlight specific issues that resonate strongly for a foreign audience. For example, he notes that he quit the Soviet KGB because he knew "that the Soviet Union did not have a future." Likewise, he knew that he "would never side" with August 1991's putschists.

While some may feel swayed by these comments and the series of laudatory remarks from his associates, most notably his former boss, the late Anatoli Sobchak, Putin nevertheless responds to several key questions in an odd manner that can't but cause concern.

Before addressing post-election apprehensions raised by Putin's recent interviews, I should point out some revelatory comments about his service in the
Yeltsin regime. In response to a question about whether nostalgia prompted him to accept promotion to director of the Federal Security Services (FSB), Putin responded "No. Do you think I was asked? Do you think anybody wanted my opinion? (...) The President signed a decree and that was that.”
(KOMMERSANT, 10 Mar 00; Agency WPS, via lexis-nexis)

While it is little cause for surprise that Yeltsin had delegated a significant portion of his presidential duties in the past few years, it is stunning that a post as powerful as FSB chief could be filled without a meeting, consultation or even the knowledge of the appointee. Putin, later in the same interview, also made clear just how isolated former President Yeltsin was from decision-making, even on major, substantive policy issues.

The Kommersant interviewer suggests that Putin could not have launched the Chechen campaign on his own initiative, that Yeltsin would have had to have made that decision. Putin does not revert to the standard answer of the Yeltsin years, that the president himself made all final decisions. Putin instead claims, "Yeltsin backed me up. (...) I merely kept him informed."

While it is possible that Putin's remarks about Chechnya can be seen as an electoral ploy to take full responsibility for a popular policy, it seems more likely that his response provides further confirmation that, in the latter years of the Yeltsin presidency, a group of advisers and their associates were likely making a broad range of significant decisions in Yeltsin's name.

Perhaps the most startling answer Putin gave in this Kommersant interview, however, was a distinct refusal to respond. The interviewer asked a question that has concerned many. Given the lack of a clear electoral platform and a background in the secret services, there have been widely published apprehensions that a Putin electoral victory would result in the establishment of an authoritarian police state regime. When prompted by the interviewer to
address the belief that he would "change dramatically right after the elections."
Putin replied, "This is not something I will answer."

Feeling reassured yet?

Rhetoric or warning?
Putin has also stepped up his verbal assault on Russia's leading financiers in recent weeks. In earlier remarks he claimed he would distance the oligarchs from state power; now he suggests he will eliminate them altogether. Speaking to Radio Mayak (18 Mar 00; AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, via C-afp@clari.net), Putin attacked the influential businessmen, who have been "merging power with capital." "Such a class of oligarchs will cease to exist," he claimed.

While there is little doubt that threatening Russia's super rich and powerful business elite has popular appeal and is effective campaign rhetoric, it must cause some concern to the targets of his attacks. The inconsistency present in Putin's relationship with some of the oligarchs, and their continuing support for his candidacy, as contrasted with Putin's rhetoric, is reflected in the case of Anatoli Chubais. As in previous instances, Putin has once again managed to couple praise for one of Russia's kingmakers with a critical slap, leaving the audience to wonder at the future president's opinion of one of the West's favorite "reformers." Putin recently lauded Chubais as a "very good manager," but in the same breath derided him as a "stubborn Bolshevik," with a "very poor credit rating among the people." (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 0740 PST, 16 Mar 00; via C-afp@clari.net) It is intriguing that Chubais remains an ardent Putin supporter despite the "ambivalence" of the acting president. Perhaps Chubais knows something about Putin that the public does not, or perhaps, vice versa.

More concrete indications of both the influence of the oligarchs on the Putin government and Putin's attitude toward them, may come through actual government policy, as for instance in the struggle to resume "tolling" in the
aluminum industry. According to one report (OBSHCHAYA GAZETA, 2 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0302, via World News Connection), the recent acquisition of Lev Chernoy's aluminum interests by Roman Abramovich and Boris Berezovsky could result in the government-approved resumption of tolling operations, provided Berezovsky and Abramovich continue to wield the level of influence in the Kremlin, which they have been rumored to have enjoyed in the past. Time will tell.

**FSB**

**Ryazan bomb test**

Despite fevered denials, evidence continues to mount that the security services were involved in at least one of the "terrorist" bombings last September. In an article in The Observer (12 Mar 00; via www.newsunlimited.co.uk), the bomb squad officer who defused the bomb in a Ryazan apartment block was quoted as saying "It was a live bomb." This incident had been called a "test" of public alertness after those planting the bomb were discovered to be FSB officers.

The bomb squad officer, Yuri Tkachenko, also claimed that, while testing the sugar sacks where the bomb had been placed, his gas analyzer gave a positive reading for Hexagen, the same explosive that was used in the Moscow bombings. While the FSB removed the potentially lethal sacks from the building, they apparently left behind the detonator, which the article's author claims was set for 5:30 AM. The timing of the explosion could have resulted in significant civilian casualties.

**Russian Federation: Foreign Relations**

By Chandler Rosenberger and Sarah Miller

In balancing a cautious White House against an eager Downing Street, acting Russian President Vladimir Putin again has proven how easy it is to take
advantage of the absence of a united Western stance towards Moscow. Domestic pressure may have forced the Clinton administration to back away from its endorsement of the Kremlin's master, but its early failure to unify condemnation of the war in Chechnya has legitimized "engaging" Russia at any cost. Tony Blair has been quick to pick up where Clinton left off.

**Engagement postponed?**

Stung by criticism that the White House had all but endorsed Putin in the upcoming presidential elections, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright published an op-ed article in The Washington Post to deny the charges. The administration, Albright wrote, had not endorsed Putin, but merely had noted that Putin is "capable and energetic, knowledgeable about the issues, blunt and direct, with some positive things to say about economic reform, the rule of law and arms control. All simple statements of fact, but hardly an endorsement."

(THE WASHINGTON POST, 8 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

Albright's characterization of the administration's response to Putin was, however, disingenuous. Among the "simple statements of fact" that President Bill Clinton has made since Putin rose to power are that Russia was engaged in "liberating Grozny" (TIME, 1 Jan 00) and that the US "can do business with this man." (THE WASHINGTON POST, 17 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis)

Testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Human Rights Watch researcher Peter Bouckeart complained that "instead of using its relationship with Russia to bring an end to the abuses in Chechnya, the Clinton administration has focused on cementing its relationship with Acting President Putin, the prime architect of the abusive campaign in Chechnya." Albright, Bouckeart noted, had "traveled to Moscow while bombs were raining down on Grozny, and chose to focus her remarks on Acting President Putin's qualities as the new leader of Russia, rather than on the brutal war in Chechnya." (TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, 25 Feb 00; via www.hrw.org)
As subsequent clashes over Iran and Yugoslavia showed, the administration's embrace of Putin was not only a policy that dared not speak its name, but an ineffective one at that.

**Russia, US clash over nuclear technology to Iran**

In mid-March Russia reacted angrily to passage of a US bill that will allow President Clinton to impose sanctions on countries that the White House concludes are helping Iran to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Russian protests that its current contracts with Iran are harmless were undercut when the Czech government concluded that similar contracts with Czech companies might help Iran to test nuclear weapons.

On 15 March President Clinton signed the bill, which permits him to ban contact between the American government and US companies with any foreign government and company that furnishes Iran with dual-use goods, services and technologies. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 16 Mar 00)

Although relieved by the president's announcement that US support for the joint Russian-American international space station would remain exempt from sanctions, Russian officials objected that the US was bullying foreign companies to fall in line with its domestic legislation. "The government of the Russian Federation disagrees with this law, considers it discriminatory and biased because basically any country can be qualified as a violator by the US president's wish," Russian Vice Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov stated. (ITAR-TASS, 1508 GMT, 15 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0315, via World News Connection) The Russian government claimed that Russian contracts to help Iran build a nuclear power plant in Bushehr did not violate the law, since its nuclear technology had no military applications.
The argument that Bushehr was an innocent civilian joint venture can be viewed, however, as a red herring -- and an ineffective one. Two weeks before Clinton signed the sanctions into law, the Czech parliament voted to prevent the Czech firm ZVVZ Milevsko from exporting air conditioning equipment purchased by a Russian company for use in the Bushehr plant. Czech Deputy Foreign Minister Hynek Kmonicek argued that, although the Bushehr plant was a civilian project, technologies for military applications could be tested in it. (CTK, 1818 GMT, 1 Mar 00; FBIS-EEU-2000-0301, via World New Connection)

Bushehr is also among the least threatening of the joint projects between Russian and Iranian firms. In 1997, the Russia was accused of transferring sophisticated missile guidance technology to Iran. (See ISCIP EDITORIAL DIGEST, 25 Sep 97) To concentrate narrowly on the military applications of the Bushehr project is to risk overlooking other, far more dangerous technology transfers.

**Russia and NATO: petulant partners?**

The dance of the White House and the Kremlin around questions of "engaging" Russia in NATO affairs also grew more complicated. Putin suggested Russia might some day join the alliance, while Russian actions in NATO's most complex mission -- Kosovo -- indicated that no amount of "involvement" could overcome fundamental differences between the strategic aims of Moscow and the West.

In an interview with the BBC preceding British Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit to Russia, Putin said that Russia does not rule out someday joining NATO. "We believe we can talk about more profound integration with NATO," Putin told the BBC's David Frost, "but only if Russia is regarded as an equal partner." Putin's comments were "clarified" the following day by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who stressed that Putin had merely given a "hypothetical answer to a hypothetical question." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 7 Mar 00)
Putin's discussion with Frost, however, offered a portrait of the acting president as a man in favor of broad engagement with the West. Russia had opposed eastern expansion of NATO, Putin suggested, only because Moscow had been excluded from discussion of the issue. "But this does not mean we are going to shut ourselves off from the world," Putin said. "Isolationism is not an option." (INTERFAX, 1203 GMT, 5 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0305, via World News Connection)

Subsequent wrangling over the fate of the NATO mission in Kosovo demonstrated, however, that Moscow does not promise friendly cooperation when it pledges more engagement with the rest of the world. Even before a Russian soldier participating in the KFOR mission was shot in Srbica, Ivanov had warned that Russia might withdraw from the Kosovo mission "if the situation leads to the threat that we face Kosovo's separation from Yugoslavia." Ivanov spoke at a press conference following meetings with US and European officials in Lisbon. (INTERFAX, 1538 GMT, 2 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0302, via World News Connection)

At a time when the party of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic is in some danger of losing power, Russian officials have also spoken strongly against efforts to undermine either him or his rule. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, has accused the UN's War Crimes Tribunal of pursuing policies that are "biased" against Yugoslav officials. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 1 Mar 00) NATO war games planned in Kosovo for late March and early April, Lavrov said, were being prepared with "downright disregard for Yugoslavia's sovereignty" and would "considerably destabilise not only the province but the region as a whole." (ITAR-TASS, 1306 GMT, 7 Mar 00; FBIS-EEU-2000-0307, via World New Connection)

In his meeting with Blair, Putin took time to stress the importance of defending Yugoslav integrity and to urge cooperation with Milosevic. "One can have
different opinions of him," Putin said, "but he is the legitimately elected president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." (INTERFAX, 1113 GMT, 11 Mar 00; FBIS-EEU-2000-0311, via World New Connection)

**Perfidious Albion?**

Into the momentary breach between Moscow and Washington swept Tony Blair's Labour government, elected in 1997 in part on a pledge to pursue a foreign policy more "ethical" than that of its Conservative predecessors. Although Blair hacks spun tales of how tough Blair had been on Putin about Chechnya, the leaders' reported disagreements did not prevent them from enjoying a night at the St. Petersburg opera watching the latest production of Prokofiev's "War and Peace."

In several respects, the Blair visit broke new ground in audacity. By talking of long-term programs for investment and restructuring with an acting president facing election in less than two weeks, Blair gave Putin an endorsement far more ringing than any even fawning Washington had offered to date. Blair, furthermore, reportedly offered Putin a full range of services from financial and press relations gurus to advise Putin's government on "Labour policies such as welfare-to-work and the drives against homelessness and crime." (THE DAILY MAIL, 13 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

Clinton and Blair have long been engaged in a friendly contest over who will earn the legacy as the most effective reformer of the post-Cold War Left. They will now compete, it seems, for the privilege to claim Putin as their Gorbachev. Putin seems happy to have two Western leaders competing for his attention. The deeper each is "engaged" in his work, one suspects, the more difficult it will be to criticize Putin should his regime pursue a politics more deadly than an anodyne "Third Way."

**Strategic cooperative partnership expands, rumors notwithstanding**
Over the past few weeks several rumors concerning the future of Russian-Chinese relations emanated from Moscow. In addition to false rumors that Beijing was going to buy the Russian space station Mir for several billion dollars, anonymous defense sources allegedly leaked the contents of a "secret decree" barring the Russian defense industry from selling any military production licenses to China. Also, the newspaper Segodnya noted a change in the government's China rhetoric suggesting that the Putin government was moving away from the Russo-Chinese "strategic cooperative partnership." (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 14 Mar 00)

Sorting through Moscow's rumors can be tedious work, but a flurry of diplomatic activity between Russia and China over the past few months helps to paint a clearer picture. Since Yel'tsin's trip to Beijing last December, the Chinese foreign and defense ministers have separately visited Moscow and Russia's deputy foreign minister has gone to Beijing. Moreover, despite Segodnya's report of a change in Russia's strategic partnership rhetoric, during these last four meetings references to it have not decreased. When commenting on Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan's trip to Moscow in late February, strategic cooperative rhetoric abounded; Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said, "Russia is satisfied with the strategic partnership with China." (XINHUA, 1544 GMT, 29 Feb 00; FBIS-EAS-2000-0229, via World News Connection) Putin likewise said, "Russia attaches great importance to the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership of cooperation." (ITAR-TASS, 1504 GMT, 1 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0301, via World News Connection) Meanwhile, during his trip to Beijing, Deputy Foreign Minister Ilya Klebanov said he was sent with "an order to strengthen friendship and trade and economic relations." (ITAR-TASS, 2341 GMT, 1 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0301, via World News Connection)

The only change in rhetoric has been an addition to the original language. This was especially clear during Klebanov's trip in early March, during which he noted a "certain dissatisfaction with trade and economic cooperation." (ITAR-TASS, 4
Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) In effect, Klebanov's trip was a concrete indicator of Russian desires to broaden the strategic cooperative partnership by deepening economic ties, especially in the trade, science and technology, energy and nuclear power sectors.

This initiative is part of a deepening of Russian-Chinese relations over the past few years. Beginning with military-technical ties, the partnership has broadened over the past 18 months and through common stances on many international and regional issues such as ABM, Iraq, Kosovo, the Korean peninsula, Taiwan and Chechnya. At the recent meetings in Moscow and Beijing, the sides reconfirmed their common views and expanding partnership, but now Russia is purposefully expanding bilateral relations in other spheres.

Klebanov's visit signaled Russia's attempt to target specifically non-military-technical sectors for expansion. At meetings with State Councilor Wu Yi, Klebanov signed a protocol to step up work on two gas pipeline projects, as well as consideration for a third Russian-Chinese pipeline. (ITAR-TASS, 3 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) The protocol also included provisions for increasing bilateral cooperation in outer space, the high-tech industry, commerce, and investment, among others. Klebanov also met separately with President Jiang Zemin, Premier Zhu Rongji, and General Zhang Wannian, during which several "current issues" were discussed including the Sovremmeny destroyer deal and possible Russian assistance in developing the Chinese space program and station. (JAPAN ECONOMIC NEWSWIRE, 4 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) Thus, while the Chinese may not be buying Mir, they will certainly accept Russian help to build their own.

These decisions, coupled with the continuity of rhetoric on both sides, suggest that if Russia is secretly planning to limit China's purchase of Russian military licenses, it is not because Russia intends to limit the entire Russian-Chinese partnership. To the contrary, by taking concrete steps to expand bilateral...
relations outside of the military-technical dialogue, Russia is expanding the substance of the partnership as a whole.

And yet there is one last rumor that hasn't yet been proven true or false. According to Klebanov, Putin and Jiang will sign a "very important document" at the Russian-Chinese Beijing summit this summer. The contents of the alleged document have not been released, but according to Klebanov, it "will declare and record the actions of our countries on [attaining] true strategic partnership."

(RITAR-TASS, 1459 GMT, 2 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0302 via World News Connection)

Russian Federation: Media

By Jonathan Solomon

A covert war on the independent press?
For those who thought that the Babitsky affair was an isolated case, think again. Recent weeks have featured a number of incidents involving the independent media that have aroused suspicions of "power agency" involvement.

Incident #1: Borovik's 'Top Secret'
Early on the morning of 9 March, a YAK-40 business jet bound for Kyiv crashed seconds after takeoff from Moscow's Sheremetevo Airport. Among the nine fatalities were muckraking journalist Artyom Borovik and oil magnate Ziya Bazhaev, an ethnic Chechen. Borovik was president of the Sovershenno Sekretno (Top Secret) publishing house. While the Moscow Transport Prosecutor's Office felt that the crash was an accident stemming from a violation of safety rules, the FSB made a statement the afternoon of the 9th that suggested Chechen terrorists might have been responsible. According to FSB spokesman Alexander Zdanovich, Chechen militants had previously been pressuring Bazhaev to give financial support for their war effort, but the wealthy oil magnate refused.
Zdanovich covered his assertion by saying that "it is premature yet to firmly state that it was an act of terror." (ITAR-TASS, 1637 GMT, 9 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0309, via World News Connection) Indeed, many technical factors of the crash did not add up, leading to speculation of foul play, but not necessarily by the Chechens. (JOHNSON'S RUSSIA LIST, 10 Mar 00)

Borovik rose to prominence as a pioneering investigative journalist during the early days of glasnost, writing probing pieces about the Afghan war among other subjects. He worked for the American CBS network's flagship newsmagazine "60 Minutes" during the early 1990s, and also began publishing his own monthly investigative paper, Sovesheno Sekretno, that quickly became popular for its scandalous revelations of corporate and governmental corruption. Sovesheno Sekretno created the core of a mass-media company that became involved in television production and book publishing. In 1999, Borovik entered into a partnership with US News and World Report, and with that publication's funding started an investigative weekly titled Versiya.

The attendance at Borovik's funeral was a virtual who's who of Russian politics, minus acting President Putin, who sent his condolences to Borovik's family and praised his work as a "famous journalist" whose "readers impatiently waited for his publications." Grigory Yavlinsky and Yuri Luzhkov were there, as was Borovik's close friend Yevgeny Primakov. The overwhelming feeling in the air was that Borovik had met his fate at the hands of an enemy he had made in the course of his investigative career. "I don't understand how society and the government can possibly be indifferent to threats addressed against journalists. Why is there no reaction? Why are we so helpless? Why can't we twist these scoundrels' heads off?" declared Primakov. (MOSCOW TIMES, 14 Mar 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru)

The question is, if Borovik and Bazhaev were assassinated, who ordered the hit? Allegedly, Bazhaev was not even supposed to be on that flight. According to the
Moscow Times, Bazhaev had a ticket to fly to Kyiv that morning on a Transaero aircraft set to take off only a half-hour later than the fatal flight, but the Transaero was delayed for an hour, so he switched to his friend and business associate Borovik's chartered plane. Bazhaev's associates thus found it unlikely that he could have been the target due to the short notice involved in his change in itinerary. (MOSCOW TIMES, 11 Mar 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru)

So if Borovik was the target, what was the reason? A frightening possibility emerges from the fact that Versiya had been investigating the Ryazan incident last fall, in which a bomb was found in an apartment building following the pattern of the other "Chechen terrorist attacks" that eventually led to the current adventure in Chechnya. However, the FSB claimed that the incident had not involved a live bomb, and instead had been a test of local law enforcement agencies' responses to such a threat. However, Versiya and Novaya gazeta, in investigations independent of each other, recently turned up strong evidence that the FSB was directly involved in the incident -- that agents had set a real bomb and the Ryazan apartment building was supposed to be another "terrorist attack." (MOSCOW TIMES, 16 Mar 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru)

The implications are obvious. If the bombings were the work of the FSB in order to incite terror amongst the Russian people and build popular support for a return to Chechnya, they would have been planned while Putin was still director of the FSB. If the whole "terror campaign" were to prove a sinister hoax and were exposed as such, rationale for the return to Chechnya -- as well as a Putin regime -- would evaporate. Needless to say, Putin would be in a lot of trouble. It is too early to tell, but the possibility definitely exists that Borovik was silenced by an enemy he was only beginning to discover, and that he had uncovered something that this enemy deemed critical.

Incident #2: An attack on Novaya gazeta
While Versiya has only published one article that probes Ryazan, Novaya gazeta has been publishing a series on the topic. Its last report on its investigation into the bombing attempt hit the newsstands on 13 March. Just before 3 PM Moscow time on 15 March, shortly before the Thursday edition went to press, someone hacked into the paper's computer network and erased the layouts for that and the following Monday's issues. Deputy Editor Sergei Sokolov believed that the cyber attack was targeted at one of the articles in the Thursday edition. "There are many possibilities. Naturally, most of the articles were about the election campaign," said Sokolov. According to Sokolov, investigative pieces that revealed the sources of funding for Yel'tsin's 1996 and Putin's current campaign were to be the highlights of that issue.

No article on Ryazan was scheduled for the issue in question. Still, the author of the Ryazan series, Pavel Voloshin, was convinced that the attack was related to his investigation. In his 13 March article, he had revealed that a paratrooper named Alexei P. had been guarding a storehouse last September that contained sacks marked "sugar." When the paratrooper and a friend opened one to "sweeten their tea" and it tasted amiss, they notified their superiors, who tested the "sugar" and found it to be the explosive Hexagen. In the Ryazan apartment, similar sacks of sugar with a detonator were found. For their part, the paratroopers were allegedly warned by FSB agents that they had "exposed state secrets" and that they were to forget all that they had seen. Voloshin concluded this damning article by posing direct questions to the FSB to explain the reports. He felt that "the FSB answered in an untraditional way." (MOSCOW TIMES, 16 Mar 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru)

Though this incident is particularly suspicious, according to National Press Institute program director and Moscow Times contributor Robert Coalson, it is not unusual. "It happens in the regions fairly regularly. About once a month or so, either a paper gets its computers wiped out or the whole print run gets impounded." (MOSCOW TIMES, 16 Mar 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru) What
seems different is that this is the first time, at least in a while, that a major metropolitan paper was the target. Novaya gazeta, like Versiya, is known for its probing and sensational investigations. The two also hold the distinction of being the only two major publications digging into Ryazan. It would seem that if Novaya gazeta was attacked for Voloshin's work, it was more of a warning based on the content of the previous issue than an attempt to prevent a specific article's publication in the current one.

Incident #3: Of muggings and moles
Vladimir Gusinsky's independent media empire supported Fatherland-All Russia and, to a lesser extent, YABLOKO during the Duma elections in December. Increasingly, his flagship holding, NTV, has been hostile to Putin's electoral campaign and also has covered the Chechnya war with a more critical eye than most other outlets. Its political satire puppet show "Kukly" has particularly aroused the ire of Putin supporters for its "public insult," and ignited "a special rage and frenzy" of the acting president. In early February, several professors at St. Petersburg University published a petition in the city government paper Sankt-Peterburgskiye vedomosti stating that the show was at least an "abuse of freedom of the press" and possibly criminal. (MOSCOW TIMES, 10 Feb 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru)

And now, the intrigue. On 10 January, a young man named Denis Filin was detained for questioning regarding a purse that had been stolen by one of his friends. What makes this special is that Filin's mother, Eleonora Filina, is host of a cultural music program on NTV. What makes this even more special is that, according to Filina, the FSB tried to force the local authorities to charge her son formally as an accomplice, and then allegedly made an attempt to recruit her as an agent within NTV. A month after the mugging, Filina received a phone call from a man named Andrei Ganenko, who identified himself as working with "institutes of higher learning." Ganenko suggested that he could help her with her son's troubles, but not for money or plain goodwill, and instructed her to keep the
conversation secret. What struck Filina was that her son had only been held temporarily for questioning, and had not been charged, so her son required no "help."

Two days after Ganenko's call, a police investigator called her to inform her that he, too, had been the recipient of peculiar calls from Ganenko. She was told by the officer that Ganenko had tried to persuade him to charge young Denis in order to "keep his mother in tension," but the officer assured her that such efforts would not work. The officer, when interviewed by Novaya gazeta, confirmed Ganenko's attempts to affect the case, and also said that Ganenko had told him that he was interested in Filin's mother because of "the very tense relations between NTV and the FSB." For the agency's part, FSB spokesman Zdanovich denied that NTV was being targeted.

As for the "institutes of higher learning" comment, according to the Moscow Times, Putin said in an interview for Kommersant that when he was in law school at Leningrad State University, he was approached by a KGB recruiter at his home who identified himself as one who "works with institutions of higher learning." (MOSCOW TIMES, 14 Mar 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru) If what Filina claims is true, then she was indeed the target of a hostile recruiting attempt by a state security agency that sought to place a mole within NTV. Putin was not kidding when he said that "Russia should be a dictatorship of law."

The not-so-covert war on the media

Putin's recent statements that, in his future administration, the influence of the oligarchs would be drastically reduced, seems to have struck Boris Berezovky where it counts. ORT was a strong supporter of the Kremlin-allied Unity bloc in the December elections. But recently, ORT's coverage style has changed.

For once, Rossiyskaya gazeta astutely observed "one of the country's main television channels, which previously refrained from playing up the federal
casualties in Chechnya, has recently begun steering everything in that direction."
The government rag suggested that the reason was to "drive down the popularity
erating of the most likely contender for the presidency" because "the actual owner
of the television station associates this contender with the establishment of an
economy based on corporate entities, which he does not want, to replace the
present economy based on individual entities." (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 2 Mar
00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0302, via World News Connection) Not too subtle, was it?

On 29 February, Press Minister Mikhail Leslin announced that ORT's broadcast
license, as well as that of Luzhkov-allied TV Center, would not be automatically
renewed, and that their licenses would be put up for a tender of 30 million rubles
on 24 May. (INTERFAX, 1202 GMT, 29 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0229, via World
News Connection)

Even the independent Moscow Times is under assault. According to its editor,
Matt Bivens, a $9 million tax bill was recently levied against the paper based
upon the claim that "any article mentioning anything that can be bought or sold is
an advertisement," but they beat it in the courts. (THE WASHINGTON TIMES, 27
Feb 00) No subtlety lost here, either.

Putin's campaign also issued an alarming statement on 4 March that can be
interpreted as a harbinger of much of what has been mentioned in this piece.
"The press service of the election headquarters will continue to closely watch all
facts or lies in respect of the candidate for the post of Russian President V. V.
Putin, and reserves the right to use all means available in its arsenal for -- as it
has been stated more than once -- an 'asymmetrical' answer to the
provocations."(ITAR-TASS, 1220 GMT, 4 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0304, via
World News Connection) Arsenals? Asymmetrical responses? It sounds more
like a statement issued during an international game of crisis brinksmanship than
something that would come out of the campaign office of a baby-kissing
candidate.
Ladies and gentlemen, a multi-front, open war has been declared upon the press in Russia.

**Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch**

By Michael Thurman

**The reintegration of Chechnya into the Russian fold continues**

The Russian government is bringing Chechnya back into the federation in three ways. First, 10-12 districts in Chechnya will be allowed to participate in the 26 March presidential elections. Over 300 electoral stations have been set up in anticipation of the upcoming vote. All eligible voters are encouraged to participate, though there appears to be a problem with the availability of identification papers as a result of the recent fighting. CEC chairman Vladimir Veshnyakov says that a solution will be devised soon. (ITAR-TASS, 1050 GMT, 1 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0301, via World News Connection)

Second, there are suggestions for rebuilding the Chechen economy. Acting President Vladimir Putin has drafted a program for developing the North Caucasus including, of course, Chechnya. He envisions a large public works program for Chechnya to rebuild its damaged infrastructure as well as its more viable industry. The plan also calls for the creation of small plots of agricultural land to be distributed to the population to increase self-sufficiency. How he plans to pay for this plan is not clear. (ITAR-TASS, 1408 GMT, 24 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0224)

The third development is disturbing and has the potential to increase the power of the presidency significantly. Putin is being pressured by Federation Council
Chairman Yegor Stroev, among others, to extend direct rule over Chechnya. Stroev says that "[Putin] agreed that direct presidential supervision over Chechnya is necessary, but only after the presidential elections." He has assured Putin that whatever laws are needed to facilitate Moscow's direct rule would be quickly drafted and passed. Stroev believes that both houses of the Federal Assembly would be willing to pass a bill "on a special administrative regime in places where federal laws are not observed." [Emphasis added] He makes the troubling request, "Let Chechnya be a precedent." (ITAR-TASS, 1446 GMT, 12 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0312, via World News Connection)

The last thing Russian democracy needs is a law allowing the president to suspend local government and impose direct rule based on some vague assessment of regional observance of federal law. Such a law would constitute the thin edge of a wedge leading to the slow elimination of the last check on the president's almost imperial power -- federalism.

**Back to the future, or from election to appointment**

Once again, the proposal has been made to return to a system of selecting regional governors by presidential appointment. This system was used from 1991 to 1994 when governorships in all 89 regions became elective posts. Aman Tuleev, the head of the Kemerovo Oblast' and a presidential candidate, issued the suggestion last month. There has been some support from other governors, though not much. It should also be noted that this idea is usually presented as part of a larger slate of reform proposals intended to strengthen state control over the regions. Other proposals include cutting the number of regions from 89 to 32, or alternatively establishing "super-regions" which would roughly coincide with the present eight economics associations. Also discussed are proposals to extend the Russian president's term of office from four years to seven, as well as doing the same for the offices of the country's governors.
The proposal to return to the system of appointed governors-general has received more attention than the other proposals most likely because, first, it accords with Putin’s autocratic tendencies, such as his quiet replacement of 14 presidential representatives in the regions with former FSB officers. Appointing governors, therefore, may be a more attractive option for extending his power than the reorganization of Russia’s regions. And second, it is election time. Issues that normally would not have been given much attention often become topics of great debate during campaign seasons and this may be such a case.

Even so, it is hard to understand why duly elected governors with a significant amount of autonomy from Moscow due precisely to their elective status would want to subjugate themselves to the whims of a potential autocrat through a process of appointment. There are several possible reasons. First, and these all fall under the same heading of protecting governors from their own constituents, some governors may not be re-electable. By swearing allegiance to Putin, they may retain their offices and not-inconsequential perks. Second, an appointive position may provide protection from local power brokers, such as mayors and heads of important business concerns. This would significantly change the balance of power in favor of the governors if they knew they had the federal state on their side when battling with local foes. Third, eliminating elections would not only do away with the unpleasant business of kissing babies and stumping around the backwoods looking for votes, it would also remove the need to drum up campaign funds, which often leaves politicians indebted to their contributors who are again those same local power brokers.

A fourth reason may be more tactical. Citizens who are unhappy with their regional leaders may find it presently attractive, though maybe unwise, to have their leaders appointed by a popular president. Tuleev is running for the presidency and this may be a campaign position -- one which Putin and his supporters find easy to support.
Yet the constitutionality of such a law or edict is questionable, regardless of the legality of its passage. First, Article 131 of the constitution states that, "[t]he structure of bodies of local self-government shall be determined by the population independently." This suggests that, regardless of what Putin or any of the governors say, the people (or their elected representatives) in each region must independently decide if they want the president to appoint their chief executive. It would undoubtedly require amending a good number of regional constitutions one at a time, a tortuous process which would most likely net a mixed system of both appointed and elected governors.

Second, the constitution states that each region is to have two representatives in the Federation Council -- one from the executive branch and one from the legislative. If the governors are appointed, one-half of the Federation Council would be indirect presidential appointees. This would mean a violation of Article 10 of the constitution which says that, "[s]tate power in the Russian Federation shall be exercised on the basis of the separation of the legislative, executive and judiciary branches. The bodies of legislative, executive and judiciary powers shall be independent."

One way out is to change the Constitution, but many proposals for amending it have met with no success. It is no doubt a very difficult process and may not be possible -- or necessary. Yel'tsin's past acts suggest another option by his own lackadaisical adherence to the constitution. Putin could simply ignore it.

Whether Russians have a natural affinity for strongmen as leaders is certainly debatable, but the popular clamor for Putin, considering his ominous mutterings about Russia's need for an Iron Presidency (an obvious reference to Bismarck's own Iron Chancellery), certainly fits the pattern. Putin's potential victory on 26 March may be Russia's last real presidential election for a long while. If his recent comments are to be believed, Putin may find elections in the future to be
"destabilizing" and therefore unwise in a time of national "disunity." Perhaps Putin's Unity [sic] will triumph after all.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By LCDR James Duke Jr.

Feuding neighbors on the Black Sea
Spring hopes for more neighborly relations between Russia's Black Sea Fleet and its Ukrainian hosts have foundered as the two parties quarrel over energy debts and accusations of broken agreements. On 28 February, Ukraine froze the bank accounts of 15 Russian Black Sea fleet units in the ports Sevastopol and Feodosiya due to the fleet's unpaid electrical bill. (RIA NEWS AGENCY, 28 Feb 00; BBC, via lexis-nexis) On 29 February Ukraine authorities commenced cutting off electricity to the units. Ukraine authorities also allegedly detained fleet officials for tax evasion. The Russian defense ministry called the detentions "groundless" and hurled back accusations that Ukraine was discriminating against the Russian fleet and also breaking a July agreement to offset Russia's electrical debt with Ukraine's natural gas debt. (UKRAINIAN NEWS CHANNEL TELEVISION, 3 Mar 00; BBC, via lexis-nexis) Another indication that relations between the two neighbors were heading downward was Ukraine's announcement that it would restrict participation with Russia's Black Sea Fleet in the joint naval exercise "Peace Waterway" scheduled for Autumn 2000. The Russian media were quick to point out that, despite fuel and financing problems, Ukraine actively participates in NATO's Partnership for Peace program; one article threatened a continued deterioration in relations would result in a new naval build-up on the Crimea. (KOMMERSANT-DAILY, 2 Mar 00; Agency WPS, via lexis-nexis) However, the Russian press did not acknowledge the fact that the US Navy gives substantial material and expert assistance to the Ukraine Navy, allowing for participation in NATO-sanctioned exercises. In an effort to further their new relationship, US Navy vessels have visited Ukraine ports on 19 occasions since
Like nearly everyone else living in Ukraine, personnel in the Black Sea Fleet may be experiencing the effects of Ukraine's energy shortage. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 6 Dec 99) The power interruptions usually begin in the early evenings and last for a few hours, a peak demand period for Ukraine's utilities. However, Ukraine has experienced an energy crisis for nearly three months without any reported power cuts to the Black Sea Fleet, so the blackouts' timing may be tied to the dispute over the value of Ukraine's natural gas debt to Russia, and the fleet's electrical bill arrears. Until there is an agreement over the value of their respective energy debts, there cannot be a subsequent offset agreement. Ukraine appears to be using the situation to put pressure on Russia for additional negotiating leverage.

Erratic electrical service may be only a nuisance to Russian units, however, it degrades the fleet's readiness. For safety and security reasons its meager fuel allowances must be used to power shipboard emergency diesel generators instead of at-sea training. (NTV INTERNATIONAL, 5 Mar 00; BBC, via lexis-nexis) This is probably a small price to pay for the fleet's influence. Russia views the Black Sea bases as strategically important for continued access to the Mediterranean, influence in Eastern Europe, and the proximity of "external threats" such as NATO member Turkey and other non-NATO, Western-leaning states like Ukraine and Georgia. The gray warships flying the Russian flag in Ukraine territory also promote Russia's self-proclaimed "great power" status, not a mutually beneficial security arrangement.

**Newly Independent States: CIS**

By Sarah Miller

**Russian scheme gets nowhere, but the message is loud and clear**
In a bold pre-election move, acting President Vladimir Putin has provided yet another glimpse of Russia's CIS policy. Under the guise of combating terrorism, the CIS interior ministers held an emergency session in Moscow from 10-11 March at Russia's behest. Although the meeting produced few tangible results, Russia made its power designs in the CIS clear.

The participants at the Moscow meeting discussed the findings of the CIS Executive Working Group’s project on terrorism. Discussion of the project began as early as last September, when Russia first used terms like "antiterrorism" to legitimize its actions in Dagestan. At the time, several CIS bodies -- including the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, CIS defense ministers, and then Prime Minister Putin -- began to discuss possible joint efforts, resulting in the formation of the working group. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 27 Sep 99 and 1 Nov 99) Upon the conclusion of the March meeting, Putin reiterated the pervasiveness of terrorism and the "broad network of centers" that pose a threat to stability across the globe, especially in the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia.

Despite Putin's strong rhetoric to the contrary, the emergency meeting produced few results. According to Putin, the CIS will decide to create a Russian-led and -financed antiterrorism center and an antiterrorism program which could allow Russian FSB units to be stationed in CIS countries "when necessary." Despite Putin's matter-of-fact statement, he downplayed the fact that the interior ministers' vote on the matter had been only "nearly unanimous," forcing the issue back to the working group to be "perfected." (INTERFAX, 1852 GMT, 10 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0310, via World News Connection) In an apparent attempt to clarify the acting president's ominous statements, Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov emphasized that there are no plans to form a joint CIS antiterrorism special forces unit. But his statement only reconfirmed the possibility that Russian troops might be stationed on foreign soil, a sobering prospect for many CIS states. According to Ivanov, once a CIS-wide antiterrorism database is up and working, they will move to "practical cooperation," meaning
possible Russian deployment of Alfa unit troops to CIS countries. (INTERFAX, 2022 GMT, 10 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0310, via World News Connection) Not surprisingly, the initiative did not gain unanimous support.

Thus far, CIS member state officials have made no statements on the matter, but given their past aversion to Russian dominance, it is worth hypothesizing that most GUUAM members are opposed to this latest Russian shenanigan. According to CIS Executive Secretary Yuri Yarov, now that the issue has been sent back to the working group, discussion will have to wait until the next CIS foreign ministers' meeting in either April or May. However, if the latest meeting serves as evidence, the chances of approval by GUUAM members are slim, and without their approval, the CIS-wide center and program will never materialize. But even if the issue is never adopted by the CIS as a whole, it serves as an ominous reminder of Russia's newly invigorated and aggressive CIS policy under Putin.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Clinton just says 'no' to Yushchenko

Administration officials, financial analysts and opposition party leaders must be waiting for the other shoe to drop. On 14 March, the IMF accused Ukraine of falsifying data in order to qualify for loan tranches, and imposed a limited penalty on the country. The fund is still waiting, however, for the results of a PricewatershouseCoopers audit of the Ukrainian National Bank that will be completed on 31 March.

Even without further revelations, Ukraine's relationship with the IMF has taken a pummeling. That pummeling has, in turn, reportedly led to a not-so-subtle snub
from President Bill Clinton. Clinton had been scheduled to meet with Viktor Yushchenko during Yushchenko's first visit to Washington, DC as Ukrainian prime minister. According to The New York Times, however, just days before Yushchenko was to leave for the US, he was told that Clinton would be unable to meet with him after all. "There was the sense that they should go fix this and then talk about a visit," a senior administration official was quoted as saying. "They clearly have some business to do at home to clean up this problem." (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 16 Mar 00) Of course, Ukraine denies that Yushchenko's trip was canceled due to any snub by Clinton; they say Yushchenko needed to stay home to head the investigation of the mining accident.

The IMF problem apparently stems from a system of "round-tripping" developed by Ukrainian officials to give the impression that their cash reserves were higher than they actually were. The IMF said last week that, had they known how low the reserves really were, they would not have dispersed the last three or four tranches to the country. The National Bank reportedly transferred approximately $150 million to a bank in Cyprus, and then transferred it back to Ukraine's reserve accounts in order to present the appearance of higher cash availability.

It is important to note, however, that there does not seem to be -- at least at this point -- any suggestion of an improper use of IMF money. Unlike the recent Russian money-laundering scandal, where officials may have used IMF money for personal gain, it appears that the entire Ukrainian problem revolves around the "round-tripping" scheme.

Knowing this, it is interesting that the penalty just imposed on Ukraine is the same one given to Russia: All future disbursements will remain in an IMF account and will never actually be transferred to Ukraine. It is also interesting to note that, while US administration officials are apparently refusing to meet with Ukraine's leaders, they have been eager to meet with Vladimir Putin whenever
and wherever he wants. While Ukraine is told to "clean" its house, Russia keeps dropping bombs on Chechnya and awaits its next IMF tranche.

Helping the Communist Party grow
On 9 March, a group of students took over the Communist Party headquarters in Kyiv, poured gasoline around the building and threatened to burn it down if a list of demands was not met. The students, who are reported to be from a group called either "Independent Ukraine" or the "Ukraine Self-Dependence Group," demanded that the Communist Party be outlawed, Russian-language schools be closed, pensions be paid in full and Ukraine leave the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Throughout the ordeal, which lasted 13 hours, Rukh leader Gennady Udavenko acted as mediator, thereby identifying his organization with the students who had been termed "radicals" by the media. The Communist Party, meanwhile, took full advantage of the standoff, distributing a leaflet condemning the students as "terrorists," and urging "all honest people" to stand up against "fascism, dictatorship and lawlessness." (REUTERS, 1204 GMT, 10 Mar 00; via America Online) Largely thanks to Udavenko's efforts, the students eventually surrendered, promising to use their trial as a trial of the Communist Party.

Following the arrest of the group -- which consisted of 10 men and one woman -- it was revealed that four of the students were members of Rukh, and that the organization would be paying for their attorneys. "This action was a customary way of protest against the domination of former Communist cadres, [and] the domination of pro-Russian sentiments in our mass media," said Olena Bendarenko, the deputy head of Rukh. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 1443 EST, 10 Mar 00; via America Online)

President Kuchma's administration has been quick to distance itself from the students. It is unfortunate that Rukh did not follow such a strategy. At a time
when Russia is once again complaining about what it perceives as restrictions on
the Russian language, and when the country faces its worst ever economic
downturn, extremism and radicalization can be dangerous. Most of all, they can
push individuals to support the very thing being protested. The Communist Party,
withering on the vine, may just have been given a healthy dose of water.
Unfortunately, it seems to have come out of Rukh’s rations.

BELARUS

Marching for freedom -- again

It seems the protesters who participated in the Freedom March II on 15 March
didn't give the Belarusian government what it was looking for -- an excuse to
 crank down on demonstrations. So, they had to make up one.

The protest, which included anywhere from 15,000 to 25,000 persons, depending
on whose estimate you believe, concluded peacefully and without incident.
Belarusian authorities seem to have learned an important lesson from last year’s
Freedom March I; attacking protesters will get you more international attention
than not attacking protesters. So, according to all reports, the police were civil
and even friendly.

Following the event, the deputy of the Minsk City Council, Viktor Chikin, told
Belarusian Television that the march had gone without incident. The head of the
OSCE monitoring delegation in Belarus wrote to several government officials
following the march and took note of Chikin’s remarks. Hans-Georg Weick wrote,
"As far as I understand, according to a public statement by the Deputy of the
Minsk City Council, Mr. Viktor Chikin, the march was carried out with almost no
incident of violence or unrest and with little disruption to the life of the city.
Furthermore, according to Mr. Chikin, the march organizers fulfilled all promises
made to the city authorities regarding the conduct of the event." (BELAPAN,
0330 GMT, 17 Mar 00)
Less than one day later, however, Chikin revised his comments. Chikin appeared on television on 16 March to say that marches like these will no longer be allowed in Minsk, based on the bad behavior of the protesters. According to Belapan, Chikin said demonstrators had "failed to keep their promise not to block traffic. The official pointed out that the movement of vehicles was stopped for several hours because of the demonstration." He also "accused demonstrators of provoking an assault on a correspondent of Russia’s NTV television network and said that only the police's self-restraint helped prevent disorder in the city."
(BELAPAN, 0330 GMT, 17 Mar 00)

Presumably, officials hope they can stop, or at least limit, the next demonstration scheduled to be held in Minsk on 25 March. So far, however, that plan doesn't appear to working, as opposition figures now seem more determined than ever to hold the demonstration. They were no doubt emboldened by the massive response to this last demonstration, which attracted more participants than any protest in the last year.

Belarusian authorities will keep trying, however. One day after they announced the restriction on demonstrations in Minsk, opposition leader Andrei Klimov was sentenced to six years in prison for "tax fraud and abuse of power." (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 17 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) At the same time, officials fired Yaraslaw Beklyamishchaw, the host of the "Krok-2" television program, for "flagrant violation of the rules of presentation of the program on the air and its non-compliance with the cue sheet." (BELAPAN, 0725 GMT, 16 Mar 00; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis) What does that mean in English?
Beklyamishchaw apparently allowed a filmmaker to say, "I flatly refuse to take money from this government" on the air. Shame, shame!

How much will Lukashenka allow the demonstrators to say during their now illegal protest on 25 March? This is an interesting question that will no doubt have an enlightening answer.
Newly Independent States: Caucasus
By Miriam Lanskoy

CHECHNYA
If not a parade, how about a show trial?
If the Russian military can't get a victory by 26 March, than perhaps the FSB can organize a show trial instead. Just as more and more Russians are beginning to ask probing questions about the authorship of the explosions in Buinansk, Volgodonsk, and Moscow, the FSB has nabbed a very plausible fall guy.

Russian spokesmen rushed to interpret the capture of Salman Raduev on 12 March as heralding a change in strategy against the Chechen resistance. Isn't it interesting that after more than six months of unbridled assault on the Chechen population, Moscow has announced a shift to the sort of limited operations against Chechen commanders it was supposedly carrying out all along?

Indeed the federal forces sustained considerable losses as the Chechen resistance started to rely increasingly on guerrilla tactics. There were three humiliating defeats: On 1 March, 85 Russian servicemen from the Pskov MVD perished in an ambush near Ulus-Kert. On 2 March, dozens of MVD troops were killed in an ambush in Alkhan-Kala near Dzhokhar. On 12 March, a noted commander, Ruslan Gelaev, escaped from an encircled village, Komsomol'skaya. In view of these setbacks, repeated Russian assertions to the effect that the war is all but won ring hollow.

The real significance of the operation against Raduev lies in its propagandistic value. The Moscow papers Novoya gazeta and Versiya have been investigating the possibility that the FSB covered up the discovery of similar explosives in Ryazan by saying they were part of a training exercise. (See Media section of
this issue and the Caucasus section of THE NIS OBSERVED, 29 Feb 00) Based on those reports, the YABLOKO Duma faction moved to hold a parliamentary inquiry into the Ryazan incident on 17 March. The initiative was blocked by other Duma factions, Putin's Unity faction chief among them. (www.yabloko.ru) Unity is certainly behaving as though there is something to hide and the FSB is hurriedly concocting a "show trial" that would draw public attention away from the Ryazan incident.

One Moscow-based analyst, Sergei Khodorovsky, reports that "Raduyev was reportedly betrayed by his own bodyguards whilst negotiating a cash deal with the Russian secret agents. ... Now Russian TV audiences can look forward to a noisy show trial." (IWPR, 17 Mar 00) Raduev previously had promised to deliver Basaev to the FSB in return for $1 million. It seems he was negotiating this deal with the FSB when he was arrested.

Raduev is charged with banditry, terrorism and murder in connection with the hostage-taking operation into the Dagestani city Kizlyar in December 1995. In addition, according to Deputy Prosecutor General Vasili Kolmogorov, only three days after his capture, Raduev had started "giving evidence, including evidence on the explosions in Moscow, Buinansk and Volgodonsk." (INTERFAX, 15 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) Of course there are still some suspenseful aspects to this story: For instance, is it possible to bring to light some convenient connections with Osama bin Laden and the Taliban? Can all this be served up to the cameras before the elections?

Raduev was captured near Gudermes -- a stronghold of the Russian puppet and ex-convict Beslan Gantemirov. Four years ago, Raduev broke through several rings of federal troops to escape through mine fields from the village of Pervomayskoye, but last week he was arrested without a single shot.
During the last war he suffered head wounds which left him with "one glass eye, partial sight in the other, a plastic nose and a titanium plate in his skull," and came to be regarded as more than a little strange. Many conjectured that he was in the employ of the FSB or insane, particularly when he made the outrageous claim to have been behind the 1998 assassination attempt against Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze. A political outcast, Raduev played no role in the present war.

AZERBAIJAN/ARMENIA

A region held hostage

Regional cooperation in the energy field was boosted substantially when Azerbaijan and Georgia resolved the tariff issue that had been stalling negotiations on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline for several months. The agreement was announced after a meeting of President Heyder Aliev and President Eduard Shevardnadze in Tbilisi. (CAUCASUS PRESS, 22 Mar 00) Azerbaijani concessions to Georgia follow closely on other concessions to Turkmenistan for the trans-Caspian line. These developments may reignite Western enthusiasm for the region and create some momentum for improving the regional security arrangements.

Visions for a regional security architecture were presented as early as the November OSCE summit by Aliev and Armenian President Robert Kocharian. A fuller version of the concept, The Stability Pact, was presented by Turkey's President Suleiman Demirel at a meeting in Tbilisi in January. While the Caucasian states and Turkey seem eager to develop a regional pact, the Western leaders have been very slow to respond. Russia's acting President Vladimir Putin sent a positive response to Demirel's suggestion and President Jacques Chirac of France gave a lukewarm response; however, Bill Clinton kept mum on the matter until 23 March when Voice of Turkey Radio announced that he supported the idea of a regional pact and hoped it could be used to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
In recent weeks Putin has been pushing his version of a regional infrastructure, the "Borjomi 4" (the three Caucasian states plus Russia), which held the first such meeting at the January CIS summit. The second such meeting is planned to accompany the April CIS summit and there is talk of holding more regular consultations. In a chilling recent statement, Putin aired plans to use Russian special forces on the territories of CIS states to quell "terrorism." The brutality with which Putin has implemented such ideas in Chechnya gives some indication of the danger the Caucasian states face if left alone with Russia.

When asked if "the four" could sign a stability pact at their next meeting, the Azerbaijani foreign minister, Vilayet Guliev, reiterated that it cannot be considered "until the Karabakh conflict is solved." (CAUCASUS PRESS, 10 Mar 00) So, the formation of an institution to promote regional cooperation and security is on hold not only until the West responds positively but until Armenia regains stability.

For the time being the Armenian political scene remains very tense as the standoff between Prime Minister Aram Sarkisian and President Kocharian continues. Early in March the Sarkisian faction demanded the resignation of presidential supporters on the presidential staff and in the state television management because they had complained about the conduct of the investigation into the slayings of eight leading politicians in October 99. Kocharian responded by vigorously defending his allies and assuming greater control over military appointments, thus lessening his rival's influence over the military. Nagorno-Karabakh mirrored the tumult of Yerevan's political scene when an assassination attempt left the republic's president, Arkadi Ghukasian, seriously wounded. A rival politician, former Defense Minister Samvel Babayan, was immediately arrested in connection with the shooting.
Armenian politicians are deeply worried by the violence against top officials and the obviously politicized investigation which has targeted the president. Some, like the former vice speaker of the parliament, Ara Sahakian, say that the attack on the president's circle of advisers is a "catastrophe which could lead to us losing our independence." (IWPR, 17 Mar 00) Indeed, there is a 27-member group of parliamentarians pushing the idea of joining the Belarus-Russia Union. (CAUCASUS PRESS, 8 Mar 00)

GEORGIA
Possibility of expanding the OSCE observer mission seen
During his conversation with visiting OSCE Secretary-General Jan Kubis, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze proposed extending the responsibilities of the OSCE observer mission to cover the entire length of the Georgian-Chechen border. Shevardnadze also suggested an expanded role for OSCE observers to work with UN observers in the Gali region in Abkhazia. (CAUCASUS PRESS, 21 Mar 00)

The need for this mission became evident during the Fall when repeated Russian assertions that arms and mercenaries were reaching Chechnya from Georgian territory raised fears of a Russian incursion into Georgia; the observers were deployed during the winter. In the Spring, as the field of operations moves into the southern parts of Chechnya and the snow melts, allowing easier passage over the mountain passes, the danger of such spillover into Georgian territory mounts. In fact, a recent article in the Russian military newspaper Krasnaya zvezda charged that 30 Chechen gunmen and two Pakistanis were detained by Russian and Georgian border guards. (CAUCASUS PRESS, 21 Mar 00) An international presence on the border is essential to ensuring that such incidents don't escalate into more violent confrontations and are not used by Russia to reassert control over Georgia's borders.
Presently the OSCE mission consists of 17 officers and between 20-30 Tbilisi-based civilian personnel. The vast majority of the observers are from East European and post-Soviet states, but the recent addition of two retired American officers raises hopes that more Western countries may contribute personnel to an expanded mission. According to the Georgian Border Guards chief, Valeri Chkheidze, the US has promised to supply surveillance equipment to monitor the border and the Georgians plan to establish 12 additional observation posts on the border.

For the most part, Russian representatives have refrained from commenting on the mission. Since Russia has frequently supported the idea of an OSCE security architecture for Europe, it's awkward to complain about the OSCE taking on this role in this instance. However, when the mission was being established in December, the Russian representatives tried to pack it with Russian officers, only to be rebuffed by the OSCE officers in charge.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States

By Kate Martin

Strange bedfellows indeed
The Baltic states continued their attempts to deal with their pasts, despite adversarial Russian reaction and skepticism from Israel, in a clear demonstration that the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not create a blank slate for domestic or international relations.

Russia's acting president, Vladimir Putin, repeatedly tried to involve the West in his country's clamor over the trials of former KGB personnel, to no avail. Without mentioning the Baltic states directly, Putin demanded that US lawmakers stigmatize states "where veteran anti-fascists are being prosecuted with the connivance of former Nazis." (ITAR-TASS, 0956 GMT, 15 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-
2000-0315, via World News Connection) Since Latvia's conviction of Vasily Kononov has brought about repeated accusations of human rights abuses by Putin et al., no country's name had to be listed in the demand to America. Alas, the US must live with the shame of being the second group, not the first, to be contacted by an offended Putin. The acting president earlier had tried to obtain OSCE intervention in the case, only to be told that such intervention does not fall within the OSCE's mandate in Latvia. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 1 Mar 00)

Despite Putin's exclamations, such prosecutions are destined to continue. The trial of another Soviet war veteran, Yevgeny Savenko, began in February. He is charged with crimes committed immediately following the Soviet Union's 1940 occupation of Latvia. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 28 Feb 00) "Again a veteran of the Great Patriotic War has stood before the trial, an old, ill man...," decried a statement from the Russian foreign ministry. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 1 Mar 00) Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga has repeatedly rejected claims by Russia that such trials were ideologically based and aimed at actions taken as persons fought Nazi supporters. She pointed out that Savenko is charged with crimes that occurred before war broke out between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. (BNS, 1313 GMT, 2 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0302, via World News Connection)

Although certainly the most vocal, Russia isn't the only country unhappy with the tenor of trials in the Baltic states. While the international community has been encouraging the countries to increase their attempts to prosecute war criminals (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 29 Feb 00), Israel has remained skeptical about Lithuania's willingness to seek justice. Conflict has arisen over the case of Nakhman Dushanski, a former high-ranking Soviet security officer suspected in the 1965 murder of Antanas Kraujelis. Prosecution of Dushanski, who is now living in Israel, was suspended last year after the Israeli Prosecutor's Office refused to provide legal assistance. However, the case has resumed now that
war criminals may be tried in absentia. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY
REPORT, 1100 GMT, 25 Feb 00) According to the Israeli embassy for the Baltic
states, Israel's Ministry of Justice views the prosecution of Dushanski as
"discriminatory," since Israel can list over 20 high-ranking former Lithuanian
officers of the KGB and NKVD who are still living in Lithuania and who are not
facing charges. "The decision to proceed vigorously against Mr. Dushanski while
not proceeding at all against those Lithuanian nationals who served as his
superior in the KGB... seems to be singling him out in a discriminatory manner,"
the statement said. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 28
Feb 00) Such "singling out" cannot help but exacerbate the existing tensions
between the two countries, especially given the continuing anti-Semitism that
exists in Lithuania, and demonstrates the diffidence with which that country
continues to approach any acknowledgment of crimes committed against its
citizens by its citizens in the past.

Another lingering effect of the past has generated further controversy, and serves
to highlight the dilemma many in the Baltics face in coming to terms with a history
that includes Soviet and Nazi occupations. Estonian Riigikogu members have
begun to debate a law on restoring property to persons who emigrated to
Germany at the beginning of World War II. Prime Minister Mart Laar backs
passage of the law, however, the bill faces the opposition of the People's Union
faction. People's Union leader Villu Reiljan explained: "One cannot speak of
citizenship as of June 16, 1940, because the people who then emigrated from
Estonia renounced their Estonian citizenship." While neither side has shown
much flexibility in the debate, Tonu Kauba, a member of the Center Party, said
he holds out hope that some compromise is possible. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE
DAILY REPORT, 1900 GMT, 22 Feb 00)

Meanwhile, repatriates of Estonian descent from the former Soviet Union may
soon begin to receive subsidies if they have no other sources of income. The
Estonian government approved a plan under which persons of Estonian descent,
Estonian citizens, and their next of kin repatriating from the former USSR who are of pension age and lack any income over 800 kroons would be eligible for a government subsidy. The government submitted amendments to the social insurance law to include those provisions to parliament at the end of February. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 29 Feb 00)

**Countries try to cope with not-so-silent minorities**

In addition to focusing on their citizens’ pasts, the Baltic countries are looking to improve the present, with active attempts to integrate the diverse segments of society. In fact, Estonian’s population minister, Katrin Saks, agreed to share the wisdom Estonian experts had gained in drafting their national program for the integration of ethnic minorities. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1900 GMT, 21 Feb 00) This move is all the more interesting since the Estonian program continues to be criticized within the country and is due to be revised to incorporate input from the president's ethnic minorities roundtable. Hagi Sein, the president's representative to the roundtable, said members made a number of proposals, including an increase in opportunities for language training. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 28 Feb 00) The language requirement remains a stumbling block: While the government has set up training centers, there has been a demonstrative lack of qualified teachers, funding, and materials. Thus, the fluency requirements and bureaucratic delays have been called "disincentives" for securing citizenship, according to a review by the US Department of State. (1999 COUNTRY REPORTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES, US Department of State; via www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1999_hrp_report/estonia.html) The report added, however, that there are at least 10 NGOs devoted to developing and implementing local integration assistance programs.

One government move that may increase the numbers of persons eligible for citizenship is the decision by the Ministry of Education to equate school-leaving exams with language fluency. Students attending non-Estonian institutions now
may earn language proficiency certificates with their school exams. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1700 GMT, 3 Mar 00)

While Estonia and Latvia grapple with unceasing Russian complaints of (undocumented) human rights violations, representatives from another country -- Poland -- are claiming a "persecution of Lithuanian Poles." About 12 members of the Polish parliament, the Sejm, decried actions by the Lithuanian government which they perceive as impinging on the rights of ethnic Poles in Lithuania. Polish Foreign Minister Radislaw Sikorski assured the MPs that the ministry was paying attention to their concern and that, "in spite of existing problems, the situation of Lithuanian Poles is good." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 22 Feb 00)

**Women and children first? Not yet**
A recent review by the US Department of State once more found no systematic violations of the rights of ethnic minorities in the Baltic states; however, the country reports noted problems still exist, particularly for women, children and prisoners.

In Estonia, prison conditions remain poor, the report notes, and there continue "to be credible reports that police used excessive force and verbal abuse during the arrest and questioning of suspects." The government has refurbished some prison buildings and is working towards alleviating some of the overcrowding; in addition, a multi-year plan to refurbish and restructure all the country's prison and to close Tallinn Central Prison has been drafted, but has not yet been implemented, the report stated. News was good on one juridical layer, however. The State Department said the Estonian judicial system is independent in practice. Moreover, in general civil liberties are respected. And, the report noted, despite repeated allegations from Russia of human rights violations affecting noncitizens, the OSCE mission in Estonia and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities said they could find no pattern of such abuses in the country.
Latvia also received generally favorable remarks in its country report, although, like Estonia, crime doesn't pay. The State Department noted there were "credible reports that police and prison personnel beat and mistreated prison inmates." And, unlike its neighbor to the north, in Latvia an "inefficient judiciary did not always ensure the fair administration of justice." The courts "must rely on the Ministry of Justice for administrative support, and the judiciary is not well trained, efficient, or free from corruption," the review warned. Other concerns cited by the report included poor treatment of women in the home and the workplace, and child prostitution and abuse.

Lithuania shared many of the same problems with the other Baltic states, chiefly prison conditions as well as violence and discrimination against women and children. The review noted some progress made by the government toward bringing police corruption under control, however, media reports indicate "incidents of police brutality are becoming more common." Physical abuse is not limited to the judicial system either: "Abuse of women at home is reportedly common, especially in connection with alcohol abuse by husbands," the report noted. "Child abuse in connection with alcohol abuse by parents is a serious problem" as well, the State Department said. Also noted was the fact that "a certain level of anti-Semitic sentiment persists," as indicated by the desecration of several Jewish cemeteries and the Holocaust Memorial at Paneriai, Nazi graffiti on a wall of a Jewish community building, and attacks by pro-Fascist youths.
indication of such sentiment is provided by plans to found a Lithuanian National Social Party. A declaration to establish the new political bloc was signed by persons from Siauliai, Kaunas, Klaipeda,Panevezys, Marijampole and smaller towns. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 28 Feb 00)