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Putin reacts to bombing

President Vladimir Putin responded to suicide bombings at a Saturday evening concert in Moscow with sympathy and support for the relatives of the dead and injured, but did not immediately link the attacks to developments in Chechnya. While some Russian officials, including Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov, noted that the attacks followed the signing of a decree scheduling Chechen presidential elections for October, President Putin chose to refer to the suicide bombers (both of whom were killed in the explosions) as "traitors to the nation and murderers." (AGENCE-FRANCE PRESSE, 6 July 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Putin also postponed his planned visits to Uzbekistan and Malaysia. As yet, there has been no claim of responsibility for the bombings.

Update: At a Monday meeting with his Cabinet, President Putin did place responsibility for the attacks squarely on the shoulders of Chechen extremists. "They must be plucked out of the basements and caves where they remain hiding and destroyed. Their main task is to undermine the process of political settlement in Chechnya." (MOSCOW TIMES 8 Jul 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Putin's message was, however, focused on the need to protect his version of a political end to the Chechen war, rather than an escalation of attacks on Chechnya.

To each election, its own enemy

In the Autumn of 1999, a series of apartment bombings in Russia were deemed the work of Chechen rebels and eradication of these terrorists, wherever they might be, was the foundation stone of then Prime Minister Putin's presidential election bid.
As the next election season gets underway however, there seems to be a sense in the Kremlin that the continuing battle in Chechnya has wearied the Russian population, which is searching for domestic economic improvements rather than tough-sounding military actions. If this theory does hold sway with Kremlin campaign planners, it may explain why Putin's recent trip to Britain underplayed disagreements on Iraq, highlighting instead Russia's economic ties to the West, as well as the fanfare attending Putin's recently announced intention to double Russia's GDP.

It may also set off alarms for the less well-connected, and more politically active, among Russia's oligarchs. The recent arrest of a major shareholder in, and close associate of the power behind, Yukos oil company appears as a winning tactic supporting the strong economy (weed out corruption) strategy. Platon Lebedev, the second-largest shareholder in Yukos, was arrested and is being held on fraud charges dating back to the 1990's. (MOSCOW TIMES 4 July 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Another Yukos executive, Alexei Pichugin, was charged last week in connection with two murders committed last year. The investigation of Yukos officials, and Lebedev in particular, has been perceived by most analysts as an attack on Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who has used his money and influence to back both liberal political parties, such as Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces, and to counterbalance that effort with support, through the Yukos board, for the Communist Party (theoretically, hewing to the time-honored tradition of backing both sides to ensure parliamentary support for Yukos however the actual elections shake out).

As Liliya Shevtsova from Moscow's Carnegie Center notes, "This is a definite warning to Khodorkovsky to keep out of politics, if he does not want to share the fate of Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky." (FINANCIAL TIMES, 4 Jul 03 via Lexis-Nexis)
The use of the power ministries to investigate the economically powerful for political motives may not play well with the world's economic analysts, and indeed may curb any foreign enthusiasm for investment in Russia, but these are moves aimed at a decidedly domestic audience. If Putin can punish the greedy businessmen who 'profiteered' in the market hi-jinx of the 1990's and be seen as cracking down on economic corruption, he may have a winning way in the coming parliamentary and presidential elections (without need of the potent levers of electoral control through FAPSI and the other security services). Now, if only this pesky Chechen problem would go away....

More personnel moves in the Government
The inclusion of the former Governor of St. Petersburg, Aleksandr Yakovlev, in Prime Minister Kasyanov's Government and the transfer of Igor Shuvalov to the Kremlin (See N.I.S. Observed 25 Jun 03) has apparently prompted a restructuring of the Council of Ministers and their staffs.

Yakovlev takes over the housing and utilities portfolios from Deputy P.M. Viktor Khristenko, who picks up the Fuel and Energy sector and oversees cooperation with the European Union, reform of monopolies and various other sectors. (IZVESTIYA, 2 Jul 03; What the Papers Say via Lexis-Nexis)

There are also significant changes to the Ministerial Staff, including the addition of two more deputies to the Chief of Staff, bringing the total number of deputies to eight. Alexandra Levitskaya, former First Deputy Head of the Government Apparat, will join Shuvalov in the Kremlin Administration. (IZVESTIYA, Ibid.)

In other personnel moves: Gadzhimagomed Apiovich Gadzhimagomedov was appointed to head up the Government Staff for Relations with the Federal Assembly, Public and Religious Organizations, replacing Farit Mubarakshovich Mukhametshin; Presidential Adviser A.G. Burutin has been named to the Government Commission on Military-Industrial Issues; and Yuri Ivanovich
Moskaltsov has retired as Deputy Chair of the State Committee for Fishing.
(ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 26 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Scott Dullea

Putin cashes in on visit to the UK
In the month of June the Kremlin put on a foreign policy blitz with a two-fold goal of securing respect from the West and showing Russian voters how President Putin can bring home money to Mother Russia. The foreign minister toured Asia, Yevgeni Primakov signed a trade deal with the government of Laos, and Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko welcomed the Japanese foreign minister in Vladivostok. The Russian Minister of Defense, Sergei Ivanov, met with NATO and the Americans about future defense cooperation, including a joint US-Russia missile defense exercise, (WWW.STRANA.RU via RFE/RL Vol. 4, No. 25, 24 Jun 03) and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov hosted his French counterpart, Jean Raffarin, in Moscow. The main thrust of the foreign charm offensive, however, was President Putin’s four-day visit to the United Kingdom where he was accompanied by a large contingent of Russian corporate energy representatives and his foreign and energy ministers.

The pomp and pageantry surrounding the visit was notable and important but not the highlight of the event. Certainly the royal reception of President Putin will be viewed by some as Britain’s acceptance of Russia – a reprehensible thought to many Britons familiar with Russia’s record in Chechnya (THE INDEPENDENT, 24 Jun 03 via Johnson’s Russia List #7238, 25 Jun 03), but even more important for Russians at home to see how President Putin has raised the nation’s international status. It also serves as an opportunity to demonstrate to other E.U. and western nations how the British leader respects Russia, even after the
souring of relations over the Iraq debate. Although it is clear that the visit was not a response to recent events [after all, such state visits are coordinated about two years in advance (THE TIMES, 23 Jun 03 via Johnson’s Russia List #7236, 24 Jun 03)], the trip was still a well-aimed Russian foreign policy maneuver with a country of key strategic interest.

Cementing Russia’s relationship with Great Britain at this juncture may create the double byproduct of helping to stabilize relations with the U.S. and the E.U. Events that confirmed such aims included: the signing of an agreement by the U.K. and Russian foreign ministers on financing measures for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction; a tour with the Duke of York of a Russian warship on a goodwill visit to Britain during which the escorting admiral emphasized the Russian Navy’s recent participation in the NATO exercise BALTOPS, thereby underscoring Russia’s cooperation with the Alliance (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003 0626 via World News Connection); and discussions between Putin and Prime Minister Blair on sweeping aside disagreements over Iraq, on the status of Iran’s nuclear program, and on continued cooperation in fighting terrorism.

Regardless of the significance of the domestic and international perspectives of these political highlights, the real aim of Putin’s U.K. visit was far simpler: to get credit for bringing home money. In a radio interview on 26 June (MAYAK RADIO, FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection) Andrei Kokoshin, Russia’s former Security Council Secretary and Chairman of the Duma Committee on the Commonwealth of Independent States, described the economic significance of the visit: "[London] is a place where continental Europe and the United States meet, and now it is the place for contacts with big business which we need so badly. I mean the big business of the Euro-Atlantic zone." President Putin underscored Britain’s current standing as the world’s third largest investor in Russia behind Germany and Cyprus – a position which may improve pending substantial investments by British Petroleum and Shell – and noted the
burgeoning trade between Britain and Russia which almost doubled in the first two months of 2003. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection)

Having arrived well-armed with a delegation of Russian energy sector representatives, President Putin, in between carriage rides and banquets with the Queen, conducted business that may promise long term profits for Russia. The forum for most of the business meetings was the International Energy Conference which Blair and Putin officially opened in London. One result of the proceedings was a supplement to the 1999 agreement on cooperation in the peaceful use of atomic power which envisages work to scrap nuclear submarines and spent nuclear fuel in Russia’s northwest. The Conference also produced bilateral communiqués on energy and economic cooperation as well as a discussion between Blair and Putin on the need to step up cooperation in the high-tech field. (RTR RUSSIA TV, 26 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Oil and gas-related announcements, however, stood out as the most significant of the business deals. During the conference, Gazprom’s CEO Alexei Miller announced that his company would supply Britain with one billion cubic meters of gas in 2003, up 270 million cubic meters from last year. Miller noted the mutually-beneficial relationship between Europe and Gazprom, as 70% of the company’s exports go to the European market and Gazprom’s sales to Europe make up a third of the total gas imports in the region. Miller pushed for long term contracts to ensure energy security and stability and for the financing of gas transport projects to enhance the safety of energy supplies. (INTERFAX, 26 Jun 2003; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection)

During the visit, British Minister of Trade and Industry, Stephen Timms, and the Russian Minister of Energy, Igor Yusufsov, signed a bilateral memorandum on the Northern European gas pipeline project. Putin and Blair attended the signing
ceremony. The plan involves laying a gas pipeline along the bottom of the Baltic Sea, across Germany and the Netherlands to the coast of Britain. Putin supported the plan stating, "I am positive the implementation of the project will ensure stability and reliability of the deliveries of [Russian energy] to Britain and continental Europe… for dozens of years…at reasonable prices." (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 2003; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection) The project, which is valued at about seven billion dollars, is attracting the attention of Britain’s Shell Oil company, Germany’s Ruhrgas, as well as Swedish and Dutch companies, and is scheduled to begin operation in 2007. Gazprom, which the Russian Ministry of Energy favors to become the pipeline’s chief operator, intends to begin developing new gas deposits in Yamal in order to fill the pipeline. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 2003; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection)

Coinciding with this drive to encourage the long term sale of Russian petroleum to Europe, the Russian Energy Minister told reporters in London that his ministry had submitted a draft resolution to the government on the development of a feasibility study for the construction of an oil pipeline to Murmansk. Although the capacity of the system is still in question (with estimates fluctuating between 50-60 cubic million tons per annum and 100-120 million cubic tons per annum), the minister announced to reporters that the primary consumers of this pipeline’s oil would be Western Europe and the United States. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection)

President Putin picked up his most valuable British souvenir on 26 June as he and Blair observed the completion of a joint venture agreement between Russia’s Tyumen Oil Company (TNK) and British Petroleum (BP). This deal, involving a $6.15 billion investment in Russia, will be of significance for the Russian oil industry. TNK-BP will have substantial assets in the most important oil-rich regions of Russia (800,000 barrels per day in Western Siberia and 370,000 barrels per day in the Volga-Ural area). At the energy conference, BP's
leadership made statements to encourage the Russian delegation, describing how it intends to use the "skilled Russian workers" combined with outside machinery and methods to achieve optimal efficiency. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection)

Despite the fact that the final deal fell $3 billion short of the arrangement initially announced in February 2003 (RUSSIKA IZVESTIA, 27 Jun 03; What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets Database), and an additional 600 million dollars short as a result of adjustments concerning TNK’s debt (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 27 Jun 03; What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets Database), the TNK-BP venture points not only to the financial advantages for Russia but also to the possibility that Russia’s reputation among international investors may be improving. TNK board chairman Viktor Vekselberg described the deal as "an international recognition of rising stability in Russia and its progress in the [sic] economic development." (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 via World News Connection)

With Russia still smarting from its lost contracts in Iraq, President Putin has managed to deflect attention to these new accomplishments in the U.K. In this respect his visit to Great Britain can be considered a success, but is he really responsible for this success? Putin did not need to have dinner with the Queen in order to seal the lucrative financial deals, however Putin’s timely presence in Britain, in a coordinated symphony of political and economic measures, gave the impression that it was Putin who single-handedly both boosted Russia’s international prestige and brought home substantial investment to Russia. It is debatable whether these triumphs will provide long term energy-sector financial success – already skeptics are predicting the Northern European gas pipeline will never be anything more than a paper project (VEDEMOSTI, 27 Jun 03; What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets Database) – or whether the historic visit might indeed contribute to the soothing of post-Iraq relations with the West, but in a political world where perception often rules reality, Putin’s four days in Britain
may very well reward him with considerable popular and political support at home.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Kate Martin

MEDIA
Another one bites the dust
One more independent television station has gone off the air, after quite a fight. In a flagrant flouting of authority, Mikhail Lesin's Press Ministry apparently decided that laws protecting the media were meant to be broken, at almost the same time that the legislature decided more laws restricting the media were needed. The field of independent television options in Russia is now empty.

Although given until mid-June to clear the debts that served as the pretext for the closure, TVS was actually taken off the air bit by bit at the beginning of the month. A cable company owned by the Moscow city administration began disconnecting the channel from the cable network; Mostelekom's general director, Aleksandr Makhonov, denied that the motivation was political, pointing instead to TVS' debt as the cause for his company's actions. (INTERFAX, 3 Jun 03 via Johnson's Russia List #7206) He had nothing to say about the continued airing of other state-supported stations that owe far more.

The final blow came near midnight on 21 June, when a small sign appeared on the station saying "Goodbye! We have been switched off" and was followed by a test pattern. The next day, TVS was replaced by a national sports channel called Rossiya Sport. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 23 Jun 03 via www.rense.com)
This appears to be the end of the saga of the peripatetic journalists who, led by Yevgeni Kiselev, began at NTV (leaving in April 2001 when that station was subject to a hostile takeover by Gazprom-Media), moved to the Berezovsky-owned TV-6 (until minority shareholder LUKoil forced that outlet's closure) [THE RUSSIA JOURNAL, 30 Nov 01 via America Online (AOL)], and then, as part of a consortium, won the tender in June 2002 for TV-6’s license to broadcast as the TVS station. Not even the naming of former Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov and industrialist Arkadi Volsky, who had joined the TVS Supervisory Council — charged with overseeing media ethics as well as preventing "any attempts to establish censorship" of TVS programs (RUSSIAN MEDIA BULLETIN, Aug 02 via www.internews.ru/eim/august2002) – could stop a determined ministry from shutting down the station. [Primakov’s inclusion in the consortium was rather startling to some analysts who were hesitant to put the former prime minister in the pro-press freedom camp; Kiselev, however, went out of his way to assure concerned individuals that Primakov "is very sensitive to criticism in the press." (RFE/RL, 5 Jun 02)]

According to a press ministry statement, the move was "not an easy one," but the authorities had "an obligation to defend the rights of television viewers and cannot allow a vacuum to be formed on a central television channel." (BBC MONITORING MEDIA SERVICES, 25 Jun 03 via Johnson’s Russia List #7240)

At least part of the statement was correct: getting the journalists off the air was not an easy task. Indeed, the press ministry had to resort to what many are classifying as illegal moves to shut down the station.

One senior ministry official, who refused to be identified, asserted that by failing to broadcast in Moscow for more than a week, TVS had breached its licensing agreement. But Vasily Perfirev, deputy chief of Media-Sotsium, which holds the TVS broadcasting license, termed that (at best, disingenuous) explanation "absolute stupidity." The highly suspect removal of TVS from the Moscow administration-owned cable provider (which has not treated other debtor stations
in a similar manner) should not have been cited as cause Perfirev said, since "[t]here is no requirement for mandatory broadcasts" in the cities listed in the station’s license. Suspicion also rests on the press ministry’s apparently intentional disregard of the law, which mandates that television channels can be shut down only by court order. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 24 Jun 03 via www.themoscowtimes.com)

Such goings on, understandably, have ended the journalists’ fight to broadcast, but at least one person, Kiselev, plans to continue his work in another forum.

"If someone seriously asks [me] to become a (parliament) deputy, then I will seriously weigh this offer," Kiselev told Ekho Moskvy." This would give me a new outlet for airing my views, to criticize the president’s decisions...and fight for a free media." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 23 Jun 03 via www.rense.com)

But wait – there’s more
Meanwhile, journalists who still have a job now have something else to worry about – the Federation Council on 25 June passed amendments to the law "On the main guarantees to election rights." The original draft of the law had caused quite a bit of controversy this spring, and Central Election Commission (CEC) chairman Aleksandr Veshnyakov had promised subsequently that the amendments would themselves be amended before the second reading in the State Duma. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 23 Apr 03) There has been no indication that any substantive changes have been made however, and journalists had best beware, according to Oleg Panfilov, director of the Center for Extreme Journalism, "[e]specially those independent media outlets that try to preserve somehow the notion of freedom of speech, that say something during the election campaign." Igor Yakovenko, general secretary of the Union of Journalists, agreed that only certain companies would feel the effects of the amendments. "Only selected media outlets – those that initially are suspected of being able to say something ‘wrong’ – will be monitored. There would be no
limitations on praising One Russia.... As for TV, everything is all right here: we have already received a single picture and single text on all the major issues of Russia's life," he said. (EKHO MOSKVY, 1220 GMT, 25 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via Johnson’s Russia List #7240)

Reporters Without Borders warned that the closure of TVS coupled with the new amendments "seriously threaten the diversity and freedom of news coverage." The ambiguity in terminology contained in the legislation opens the door to possible restrictions on media freedom with official sanction, the group said: "The term 'electoral propaganda' is not clearly defined and could be construed as referring to any article mentioning a candidate. This would drastically curtail press coverage during election campaigns." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 25 Jun 03 via Johnson’s Russia List #7240)

Not so, according to the CEC chairman. Following passage of the bill, the commission met with lawyers of the federal media to discuss the amendments, and then met with the media to report that everything was fine. "We have demonstrated convincingly that all these innovations are aimed at protecting the freedom of speech, promote democracy, just elections, and protect the media from attempts to use them in dirty manipulations," Veshnyakov said. (RIA NOVOSTI, 27 Jun 03 via Johnson’s Russia List #7242)

LEGISLATURE

Handy end to an investigation?
The assassins of Duma Deputy Sergei Yushenkov have been caught, officials report, after a two-month investigation. (PRAVDA.ru, 26 Jun 03 via english.pravda.ru) Two individuals have been detained on suspicion of killing the liberal politician, and, according to Gazeta.Ru sources, one of them has already confessed to the crime. (GAZETA.RU, 25 Jun 03 via Johnson’s Russia List #7240) Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov subsequently issued more details,
including that among the trigger men was a recently released drug dealer.
(izvestia.ru, 25 Jun 03 via RFE/RL Newsline)

But Muscovites might want to hold off on breathing that sigh of relief, since the rest of the report is somewhat questionable. While police say they were working on a search warrant to arrest the suspects, for example, the chairman of the court that purportedly issued the warrant has said no such warrant existed.
(gazeta.ru, 25 Jun 03 via Johnson’s Russia List #7240) Moreover, it is still unclear why anyone would want to murder Yushenkov. According to an unidentified source in law enforcement, officials have decided that the motive was not political. "For the time being, a version saying that the assassination was committed because of financial relations is the priority one," the source said.
(PRAVDA.RU, 26 Jun 03 via english.pravda.ru) That notion was unceremoniously dumped, however, when a third man was arrested allegedly for ordering the hit, Mikhail Kodanev, a high-level official in the Liberal Russia faction that had split from the original party (in large part because leaders, including Yushenkov, had ousted oligarch Boris Berezovsky). (www.newsru.com, 26 Jun 03 via RFE/RL Newsline) Indeed, the climate between the two factions of Liberal Russia is so tense that a spokesman for Yushenkov’s faction, Yuri Nisnevich, characterized the investigators' theory as "probable." Berezovsky, on the other hand, likened the arrest of his deputy to Soviet-era political repressions. (BBC NEWS, 1212 GMT, 26 Jun 03 via www.bbc.co.uk)

Despite Nisnevich’s statement, it is difficult to determine what possible benefit there would be from such a move. True, Yushenkov led the rival faction of Liberal Russia, and his death (along with the earlier assassination of his deputy) could end that group’s political chances. But those chances were not strong to begin with: Liberal Russia is unlikely to obtain the requisite number of votes during the December elections to sit in the Duma, schism or no schism. Then again, the Berezovsky camp has rarely relied on clear assessments of the situation before making moves – witness earlier attempts to form a coalition with a balking
Communist Party. It will be interesting to watch how the evidence for this case plays out, and perhaps more importantly, whether the evidence will be made public.

Who else had motivation to remove the deputy from the scene? Yushenkov was widely known in political circles as a reliable liberal. He condemned the first Chechen war as early as December 1994. (Pravda.ru, 18 Apr 03 via english.pravda.ru) He staunchly refused to join the Union of Right Forces, unwilling to accept compromises or Boris Nemtsov’s leadership. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 18 Jun 03) He was a well-known defender of media freedom, and a vocal critic of security services that might be straying from the bounds of the laws they were created to protect. Indeed, last year Yushenkov brought several copies to Russia of the (now infamous) "Berezovsky tape" alleging that the security services were behind the bombings which had been used as the pretext to start the second Chechen war, but none of the media aired the video. (UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL, 11 Mar 02 via AOL) Moreover, he certainly was not the only person to share, or distribute, that tape.

Yushenkov was the most credible, to be sure, but even that credibility shouldn’t have proven too dangerous, as most observers in the West seem to have stopped (if they had ever started) caring about allegations of FSB wrongdoing. His appearance in Washington, DC in April 2002 to discuss the tape garnered little attention. The same can be said about a letter Yushenkov wrote to UK Foreign Minister Jack Straw that same month, charging FSB abuse of power in the Grigory Pasko case.

Yet, while Western officials paid little attention to the deputy, officials in Moscow apparently were noticing. Shortly after the assassination, Pasko, who worked with Yushenkov upon his release from prison earlier this year, told a reporter from the Bellona Foundation of his suspicions. "I would like to remind here that FSB Major General Alexander Mikhailov threatened Sergei Yushenkov directly
on television, in the talk show Poedinok (Duel). Everyone saw and heard the general saying: 'Mr. Yushenkov, we will take care of you later on.'"
(PRAVDA.RU, 24 Apr 03 via english.pravda.ru)

It is unlikely that a presidential connection exists to the assassination, but there is cause to doubt a complete lack of governmental involvement. The liberal democrat may have become a thorn in Putin’s side, but he was only a small thorn, surely not irritating enough to warrant removal. However, the recent results of the investigation certainly have delivered a one-two punch to one side of the political spectrum, and may serve to silence those pesky rumors around the 1999 bombings.

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Maolmordha McGowan

You are all under arrest
The Federal Security Service, the General Procurator's office, and the Internal Security Main Directorate of the Ministry of Interior joined forces on the morning of 23 June to execute a major anti-corruption strike, Interior Minister Boris Gryzlov reported on 24 June. Among those arrested were six colonels of the Moscow Crime Police and the chief of the Internal Security Directorate of the Emergency Ministry, Lieutenant General Vladimir Ganeev. The group allegedly specialized in extortion from casinos, restaurants, and trading houses, pressuring their targets into hiring a certain private security firm and into donating to their Social Protection Fund for Criminal Police Veterans. Refusal resulted in harassment and, in at least one reported case, the murder of those who resisted. Investigators also claim that the gang operated a small arms workshop, and that the weapons produced there were used in contract killings, including the murder of Duma Deputy and co-chairman of the Liberal Russia party, Sergei Yushenkov.
Later in the week, officers representing the same three security services detained Liberal Russia Party co-chairman, Mikhail Kodanev, and his former aide, Alexander Vinnik, in the town of Kudymkar. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Days prior to the announcement, the suspected triggermen identified by Gryzlov only as Kulachinskiy and Kiselev, were arrested in Kodanev’s home city of Syktyvkar. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) According to Gryzlov, Kulachinskiy confessed to shooting Yushenkov and claimed that Kiselev was his getaway driver. (MOSCOW TIMES, 27 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Gryzlov is expected to argue that the two acted under orders from Mikhail Kodanev passed along by Alexander Vinnik.

At first, Gryzlov refused to give any background or reasons for the apprehension of Kodanev and Vinnik. An official at the General Procurator's office seemed unable to describe what Kodanev’s part, if any, might have been in the Yushenkov case, instead making the peculiar assertion that "after he is questioned, his role will become clear." (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 26 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis)

Kodanev is the co-chairman of the pro-Berezovsky faction of the Liberal Russia party [Liberal Russia II (LRII), as Berezovsky calls it] and was hand-picked by the self-exiled tycoon to be his lone co-chairman and envoy. LRII was created shortly after Yushenkov’s murder and has since attempted to outmaneuver Yushenkov’s ally and LRI co-chairman Viktor Pokhmelkin, for control of Liberal Russia. Pokhmelkin vowed to bring their dispute to the Justice Ministry, which approved LRI’s application for eligibility in the December elections. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 12 May 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Pokhmelkin’s appeal to the Justice Ministry may become unnecessary given the arrest of his rival.
Kodanev and Vinnik were officially charged on 2 July with "assassination by collusion with a group." Vinnik was rumored to have confessed while being questioned by General Procurator's office investigator Igor Myasnikov. Vinnik's lawyer Oleg Komarov, insisted his client would not have confessed and suggested that if he had, then he must have been drugged by investigators. The General Procurator's office refused to comment on the reported confession. (MOSCOW TIMES, 02 July 03via Lexis-Nexis)

Kodanev apparently anticipated his arrest in connection with the murder and defended himself, preemptively, to reporters via telephone in the moments before the FSB arrived. He labeled any allegations that might be brought against him as "provocations" by pro-Kremlin forces and Pokhemlkin's LRI faction. Members of both sides of Liberal Russia, however, concede that Vinnik has had connections with organized crime and that he did use direct threats to assure that Kodanev was elected co-chairman of LRII. (VREMYA NOVOSTEI, 26 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis)

Boris Berezovsky himself recruited high-profile defense lawyer Henry Reznik to defend Kodanev. Reznik at first declined citing personal reasons, but after revealing that he had been threatened anonymously into declining the case, he decided to accept it as a challenge on 2 July. As Reznik takes up the defense, some factors in his favor: Gryzlov's case rests on the alleged confession of Kulachinskiy, who has not yet been connected either to the supposed murder weapon or to Kodanev; Kulachinskiy's record as a repeat drug offender may also raise doubts about his confession, as well as his susceptibility to police pressure.

Prosecutors will use the fact that Yushenkov was killed just hours after LRI registered with the Justice Ministry to stand in the December elections as the primary motive for Kodanev, who could have seen Yushenkov as an obstacle and rival to his political future.
On the other hand, the timing of Kodanev’s arrest adds fuel to the fire of criticism of the Putin administration. The arrest came shortly before Kodanev was to speak as the lone dissenter against the administration’s planned merger of the Perm Region with Komi-Permyak Autonomous Oblast, with Kodanev claiming that this further centralization would create a Kremlin-dominated society. (EKHO MOSKVY RADIO, 26 Jun 03 via BBC World Monitoring) Needless to say, no one will be hearing Kodanev’s speech any time soon.

The idea of rampant corruption in the Russian security services and its connection to hired assassinations should raise few eyebrows, but the arrests of high-profile perpetrators may come as a surprise. Whether the police crackdown constitutes a concerted effort to root out organized crime, or simply an election year stunt put on by United Russia leader, Boris Gryzlov, remains to be seen. It does not, however, seem to be a coincidence that two founding fathers of United Russia and potential rivals of Gryzlov, Yuri Luzhkov and Sergei Shoigu, both lost subordinates to the corruption investigation (Luzhkov through the Moscow Crime Police and Shoigu by association with the Emergencies Ministry). It would be hard to label Kodanev’s arrest as a coincidence as well, as it amounts to another silenced opponent of the Putin regime, the latest in a growing list of Putin critics to be hushed, one way or another.

And so are all of you

In another media splash last month, the Putin administration’s campaign against terrorism declared a new victory, as headlines across the nation told of a major crackdown on an Islamist group in Moscow. On 6 June, the Federal Security Service and the Ministry of the Interior detained 121 terror suspects in a sweep of a large bakery, Interior Ministry spokesman Sergei Ignatchenko announced on 9 June. Ignatchenko said that 55 of the arrested were activists of the Central Asia-based Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, (Islamic Revival Party or IRP) and that the bakery was their base of operations for the Moscow area. (VREMYA NOVOSTEY, 10 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Among the detained was the alleged
leader of the Moscow cell, who used a passport lost by a Kyrgyz citizen to gain entry into Russia under the name Alisher Musayev, according to a source in the Kyrgyz National Security Service. (ITAR-TASS, 10 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0611 via World News Connection) A suspected leading IRP activist, Akram Dzhalolov of Tajikistan, was also arrested. According to the MVD, the two were in possession of plastic explosives, grenades, TNT, propaganda leaflets, and two detonators. (ITAR-TASS, 09 Jul 03 via Lexis-Nexis) Ignatchenko called the men "Muslim brothers" of al-Qaeda and said that they were readying for possible terrorist attacks on Moscow. (THE WASHINGTON POST 10 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis)

While Russia and several other Central Asian states have banned the IRP, branding it a terrorist organization, many western states have hesitated, citing claims by the group that it rejects violence. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESS, 2 Jul 03 via Lexis-Nexis)

The security services sweep may also have cast too wide a net in this instance: Vitaly Ponomaryov, Memorial Human Rights Center’s coordinator for Central Asia, at a news conference on 24 June that 66 of those apprehended were merely immigrant workers in the bakery and that they were released almost immediately. Of the 55 actually accused of being activists in, the IRP, 47 were released after being identified and photographed (some were forced to line up against a wall in their underwear). Six more released the following day were never interrogated about their activities by the FSB or MVD. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 25 Jun 03 via www.TheMoscowTimes.com) The only two remaining in custody are Musayev and Dzhalolov, who were charged with illegally carrying the aforementioned explosives.

Perhaps the massive round up served only to minimize public scrutiny over the MVD’s cases against those two. Dzhalolov’s lawyer, Vladimir Chumak, suggested to an AP reporter that the explosives were planted during the arrest
when Dzhalolov was made to identify his bed and personal items to agents and was then forced to leave the room. Chumak has also denied that Dzhalolov and Musayev have connections to the IRP. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 25 Jun 03 via www.theMoscowTimes.com)

It appears that Dzhalolov and Musayev may have been the targets from the beginning, as they were alleged to be the highest ranking members of the IRP in Moscow. Tajikistan will discuss extradition of Dzhalolov with Russia in line with the bilateral arrangements between their security services, according to deputy secretary of Tajikistan’s Security Council, Mirzovatan Khasanaliyev. (ITAR-TASS, 14 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) The IRP has also been the target of a ruthless crackdown by President Islam Karimov, whose secular regime has been challenged by the IRP in a bid to overthrow Karimov’s government by mass public support. (THE WASHINGTON POST, 10 Jun 02 via Lexis-Nexis) It is plausible that the whole affair therefore was an attempt to curry favor with those Central Asian countries most threatened by the IRP.

Of course, one can imagine that the chance to round up over one hundred individuals on charges of terrorism was a tempting PR ploy for the FSB and MVD. In fact, the MVD barely had time to announce the arrest of 121 "terrorists" before releasing 119 of them – no questions asked. This seeming fiasco may well have resulted from the brainchild of some aspiring officials in the security services looking to pad their resumes in lieu of actual counter-terrorism successes. However, it seems more likely that the arrests, like the aforementioned police corruption crackdown, are simply an election year bid to boost public support for Boris Gryzlov’s United Russia Party in time for the Duma elections, and by association emphasize the Putin administration’s handling of internal security. For this case, at least, the fact remains that with no witnesses to corroborate the claims of the FSB and MVD, there is little reason for the people of Russia to feel protected by their security services from terrorist threats. This
incident suggests that the FSB and MVD are either wasting their time providing an illusion of security, or recklessly handling real threats to the Federation.

Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Nadezda Kinsky

UKRAINE
No Rest for the Opposition
Yuliya Tymoshenko has not been having an easy time of it this summer. When she is not having to worry about the criminal charges brought against her, which were dropped in May only for that verdict to be immediately overturned by the Prosecutor General's Office, she has to concern herself with the rather unsteady state of the opposition coalition, which is still struggling to get off the ground for the presidential race next year.

The Kiev appeals court ruled on May 13 to close the embezzlement and tax evasion cases against Yuliya Tymoshenko, her husband, and four former managers of the United Energy Systems of Ukraine corporation. On May 22, calling the supporting papers a forgery, the Prosecutor General's Office began criminal proceedings against the court. Now, the Kiev appeals court is attempting to hit back at the Prosecutor General's Office by filing an appeal against it with the Supreme Council of Parliament: "We request the Supreme Council committee on legislative support for law-enforcement activities to consider the situation caused by the violation of the criminal case and gross interference by the Prosecutor-General's Office in the administration of justice by judges of the Kiev Region Court of Appeal and to take an appropriate decision" (Interfax Ukraine, 4 Jul 03; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis).

Much has been made, particularly within her own bloc, of the political pressure imposed on Yuliya Tymoshenko by the court proceedings, and specifically of
what they have called the unlawful pre-trial imprisonments of Tymoshenko's father-in-law Hennadiy Tymoshenko and Antoninya Bolyura. They were re-arrested when the prosecutor-general occasioned the re-opening of the case in late May. However, the Prosecutor General's Office let it be known on July 4 that Kiev's Shevchenkivskyy district court found that their pre-trial detention was entirely lawful. It is clear that the political and legal pressure on Yuliya Tymoshenko will not be reduced in the near future.

The opposition faction leader is also continuing to have difficulties with the planned cooperation between her own bloc and the other opposition factions in the run-up to the presidential elections. While President Leonid Kuchma is continuing to clear the path for himself to either try to extend his term or stand for reelection, or at least to secure his options and personal safety once a new president is in power, the opposition still fails to convey the impression of a coordinated movement dedicated to its cause. Yushchenko, though still leading the polls, might begin to stumble on his own indecision and the disorder that is unfolding in his Our Ukraine faction. A harsh critique of the crumbling façade of Yushchenko's Our Ukraine Bloc was published by the weekly Zerkalo Nedeli (7 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis). While Yushchenko and Yuliya Tymoshenko have experienced great difficulty finding common cause, given their many open political differences, Yushchenko has also had trouble reaching agreements even with many members in his own faction. Tymoshenko continues to call on Yushchenko for coalition negotiations, a call that does not seem to be getting very far. The opposition factions are all politically far apart, and their obvious distrust and political differences are showing. Tymoshenko's suggestion that parliamentary posts had to be decided before fielding a single candidate was immediately dismissed by Yushchenko. Communist Party leader Piotr Symonenko was one of the opposition candidates saying that in the absence of a coordinated political view and agreement on a single program, there was no possibility of fielding a single candidate. Symonenko has ruled out any cooperation with the Our Ukraine Bloc, but has claimed that he believes the
Communist Party has a realistic chance of winning in the presidential election if they cooperate with Yuliya Tymoshenko's Bloc and the Socialist Bloc (2000, 13 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis). The longer these discussions go on, the less likely is a successful cooperation between the opposition parties, and public faith in that cooperation. Opposition leaders not only are running out of time and talking themselves into a deadlock, but more importantly this indecision and inability to cooperate may be a sign of things to come after the election that would neither bode well nor inspire trust in a lasting cooperation.

BELARUS

Whose independence?

On July 3, Belarus celebrated Independence Day. In several speeches and a televised interview, Lukashenka gave his views on the state of Belarus, Belarussian political and social situations, and the independence it has attained in the last decade and how that will be sustained in the current international environment and particularly with respect to union plans with Russia. His main comments on the subjects of the day were given in a speech to WWII veterans on the eve of the holiday, and in one televised interview with Belarussian state television STV, broadcast on Jun 30. The speech he delivered to veterans was broadcast on Belarussian radio and given - uncharacteristically for the largely Russian-speaking president - in Belarussian.

Lukashenka concentrated on an already well-known group of topics in his appearances. He praised Belarussian independence and the central role he perceives for it in the CIS and indeed Europe. He defined for Belarus a spiritual role that it carries as the holder of Eastern European civilization: "This role could be easily claimed and played by Russia, and it is claiming it. Ukraine could also play this role as the cradle of our civilization. But it is White Russia (another name for Belarus), pure and unblemished, that has happened to be at the forefront. I guess it is destiny" (STV, 30 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis). According to its President, independent Belarus is showing the best and most
lasting successes in matters of economy and social provision among the CIS: "People gravitate to our Belarus not only due to its clean streets but also due to unsullied relations between the people, humanity, openness, benevolence and compassion" (Belarusian Radio, 2 Jul 03 BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis).

In international matters, Lukashenka attempted to tread a middle path at once criticizing Russia and distancing himself from it. On July 1, he unexpectedly and suddenly withdrew the Belarussian agreement from the currency union agreement between Russia and Belarus, which had been signed in June. According to this treaty, July 1 was to be the day on which the first step towards currency unification was to begin, with Russian rubles becoming legal tender for Belarussian non-cash transactions. Despite his having signed the treaty himself, Lukashenka withdrew his agreement on the grounds that the treaty allegedly violated the Belarussian constitution (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1 Jul 03 via Lexis-Nexis). Accordingly, in his TV and radio appearances, the President underlined the need for union with Russia when speaking about distancing Belarus from the West and NATO, but simultaneously defended his decision that any union between Russian and Belarus would have to be, and would be, "a two-way street, rather than the incorporation of one nation into the other. The loss of sovereignty is out of the question. Unification will only proceed on a fair and equal basis" (Belarusian Radio, 2 Jul 03; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis).

He also criticized heavily what he perceives as Russian pressure on Belarus via the mass media: "I will put it bluntly: the pressure is currently being put on Belarus through the use of weapons of mass destruction, there is no other name for them, that is, the mass media. The mass media are weapons of mass destruction today, the most powerful ones" (STV, 30 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis). The Russian media that are available in Belarus are the only media organs in the country that are not state-controlled and hence do not solely serve the President's views. Belarussian authorities have increasingly been putting pressure on Russian media to leave the Belarussian media landscape. In the
latest such moves, NTV reporter Pavel Selin was expelled from Belarus for disseminating "distortion and false information" on July 1 - a move that also resulted in the closure of NTV's office in Belarus. Selin had broadcast and commented upon the funeral of writer Vassyl Bykov, including the airing of acts of resistance to the Lukashenka regime by those attending the funeral in the form of speeches and by displays of the forbidden national flag of Belarus (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1 Jul 03 via Lexis-Nexis).

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lanskooy

CHECHNYA
Coerced return
"Despite the deteriorating security situation in Chechnya, the forced return of IDPs in Ingushetia has already begun," said Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) director for Chechnya and Ingushetia, Mr. Gabriel Trujilo in testimony to the US Congress Helsinki Commission on 10 June, 2003.

Russian authorities are redoubling efforts to force the refugees in Ingushetia to return to Chechnya. Such measures include threats and intimidation, conducting "cleansings" in Ingushetia, squeezing international NGOs out of the region and making Ingushetia as inhospitable to refugees as the conflict zone proper.

In February, MSF conducted a survey of 3,209 Chechen families living in 8 refugee camps in Ingushetia. This represents 16,499 persons and all but 39 families who live in the camps. Of the respondents, 98% percent did not want to return to Chechnya and 93% said that they did not want to return because they feared for their security. ("Left Without A Choice: Chechens forced to return to Chechnya," MSF Press Release, April 2003) The camps represent only a small
fraction (roughly 18%) of all the Chechen IDPs in Ingushetia, since most have settled in "spontaneous settlements" or are staying in private homes.

**Situation deteriorating**

Two events this weekend demonstrate that security in Russia is deteriorating. Two suicide bombers in Moscow claimed at least 13 lives when they detonated explosives outside a rock festival on 5 July. On the same day an AFP reporter was kidnapped in Ingushetia.

These events show that the war has failed to attain the two goals it was launched ostensibly to accomplish: to stop terrorism and to put an end to the hostage trade. Four years into the war, terrorists and kidnappers have only expanded their theater of operations.

On 12 August 2002 Arjan Erkel, an MSF volunteer was abducted in Makhachkala and remains missing. In March 2003 Ibrahim Zayzikov, a humanitarian relief worker with the Czech foundation, People in Need, was abducted in Ingushetia. In May, Russian authorities assured MSF that Arjan Erkel is alive, but "where he is being held, who abducted him and for what reason remains a mystery." According to MSF, the unwillingness of the Russian government to tackle the case amounts to "the obstruction of Arjan's release." (MSF press releases 07 Mar and 12 May 03).

At present, there are no foreign humanitarian aid workers in Chechnya and increasingly Ingushetia too is becoming off-limits to foreign staff. Speaking to RFE/RL on June 20, Gabriel Trujillo, head of the MSF mission to Chechnya and Ingushetia and Patrice Page, the MSF liaison to the United Nations, recounted how the federal and Ingush authorities obstruct their efforts, making it impossible for international staff to conduct visits to Chechnya and forcing the MSF to relocate its mission from Nazran to Nalchik. ("MSF: No Right to Refuge for Chechens," RFE/RL 25 Jun 03) The "remote control" from Nalchik indicates that
the Chechen war is particularly dangerous for foreigners even in comparison with Africa, where recent wars have claimed millions of lives. "I've worked in Sudan and Liberia, our experts were there; why in this war zone are we not able to work? We know how to work in a war zone," said Page.

**UNHCR Report on Chechnya**

Western governments have chosen to pretend that Russia's sham political process provides improvement for the security situation in and around Chechnya but international bodies have documented the opposite. The UNHCR found that Chechen IDPs are routinely denied freedom of movement, were welcomed only in Ingushetia, and are now being evicted from there. The document urges that Chechen asylum-seekers should not be returned to Russia. The key findings of the report "UNHCR Paper on Asylum Seekers from the Russian Federation in the Context of the Situation in Chechnya – February 2003," which unfortunately has not received wide circulation, are summarized below.

The report found that:

"Guerrilla activities have intensified in the zones officially under the control of the Russian Federation forces. (...) Government military operations in civilian areas, where rebels are suspected to be in hiding, regularly lead to new displacement of populations, both within Chechnya as well as to Ingushetia...." (Paragraph 7, Article b)

"The situation in the TAC (Temporary Accommodation Centers in Chechnya) remains precarious: sanitation is below acceptable standards with latrines located outside buildings in insufficient numbers and non-accessible after curfew." (Paragraph 7, Article e)

"Security incidents in Ingushetia, in Dagestan, in North Ossetia-Alania (Vladikavkaz) and in Karachai-Cherkessia (Cherkess) give rise to the fear that guerrilla activity might expand to neighboring republics." (Paragraph 7, Article k)
"Several hundreds of returnees were unable to remain in Chechnya, primarily for reasons of security and harassment, as well as for lack of shelter and infrastructure, and returned to Ingushetia." (Paragraph 7, Article I)

"Access to humanitarian agencies and humanitarian agencies access to the population inside Chechnya has been hampered by security constraints" and arbitrary administrative measures. (Paragraph 7, Article n)

"Security for aid workers has deteriorated." (Paragraph 7, Article o)

The report found that ethnic Chechens were routinely denied the status of "forced migrant," which would entitle them to assistance and restitution. In fact, in Ingushetia only 89 persons have been granted forced migrant status. (Paragraph r14) Only one person has been able to obtain restitution for the destruction of property and that pertained to the 1994 – 1996 war. (Paragraph 18)

Chechens are routinely denied freedom of movement and harassed by the police. The Soviet "propiska" system has been replaced by the so-called "registration" which can be either permanent or temporary. In practice, permanent registration is needed to obtain basic services legally, such as healthcare and education and in practice this is denied to Chechen IDPs. Thus, Chechen IDPs can not move outside Ingushetia, where their existence remains highly precarious. "While officially adopting the position of voluntary return, the authorities have actively pursued a policy of inducing IDPs to return to Chechnya. This policy has been particularly pursued in the Republic of Ingushetia, where the majority of the IDPs are located." (Paragraph 25)

The UNHCR found that "Legislative mechanisms and related assistance that would facilitate the settlement of IDPs beyond Chechnya and Ingushetia are not available." (Paragraph 77)
"In other administrative districts of the Russian Federation, the combination of local restrictive regulations on freedom of movement and freedom of choice or place of sojourn/residence, anti-Chechen feelings among the public, and concerns among local authorities to contain ethnic tensions and to prevent terrorist acts, deprives Chechen IDPs of a genuine internal relocation alternative." (Article 79)

"For these reasons the UNHCR would strongly advise against considering Ingushetia as a reasonable relocation alternative for ethnic Chechen asylum-seekers originating from Chechnya." (Article 85)

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Joel Hafvenstein

TURKMENISTAN
One nation under Niyazov
The 22 June deadline for dual Turkmen-Russian citizens to choose which passport they would keep arrived amidst a storm of controversy. (See NIS OBSERVED, 18 Jun 03) The Russian Duma continued to insist that the 1993 citizenship agreement between Russia and Turkmenistan must remain in force unless and until a revised protocol is duly ratified by the parliaments of both countries. As a point of international law, President Saparmurat "Turkmenbashi" Niyazov has every right to revoke unilaterally his state's former citizenship policy; in reality, of course, Russia's continued insistence on the dual citizenship for Russians counts for a great deal.

The citizenship issue has provided an occasion for the Duma's direct involvement in foreign policy. On 19 June, the Duma international affairs committee placed Turkmenistan on the list of countries which Russian citizens are advised to avoid
(the first CIS country ever so listed); the following day, the full Duma voted near-unanimously on an unprecedented direct rebuke to Ashgabat, accusing Niyazov of violating human rights and "insulting… the honor and dignity of Russian citizens." (INTERFAX, 1220 GMT, 19 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0619 and INTERFAX, 0907 GMT, 20 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0620 via World News Connection) Niyazov responded by accusing various Russian media and politicians of slander – notably Dmitri Rogozin, head of the Duma international affairs committee, who has done the most to stir public outrage at the Turkmen situation. Two days later, the citizenship deadline arrived and passed with no formal abdications of Russian citizenship and few repudiations of Turkmen citizenship. (ITAR-TASS, 1202 GMT, 24 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0624 via World News Connection)

President Putin claims to have come to an understanding with Niyazov that the 22 June deadline applies only to future dual citizenship applications, while the status of existing dual citizens will be decided by a soon-to-meet bilateral commission. (ITAR-TASS, 1827 GMT, 20 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0620 via World News Connection) However, Niyazov has publicly stated no such thing, and his understanding of "existing dual citizens" differs in some important ways from Putin’s: The Turkmen Foreign Ministry maintains that only 47 people legitimately possess dual citizenship in Turkmenistan. The Russian Embassy in Ashgabat, by contrast, claims to have issued more than 2,600 exit visas and registered 95,000 individuals as former dual citizens. (TIMES OF CENTRAL ASIA, 2 Jul 03 via www.times.kg and INTERFAX, 1459 GMT, 24 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0624 via World News Connection)

The first two weeks after the deadline have been fairly quiet. Property rights of former dual citizens are the main initial concern; the Moscow media have issued thus far unconfirmed reports of Russians being evicted from their apartments. (INTERFAX, 0627 GMT, 27 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0627 via World News Connection) However, the stage is possibly being set for a broader crackdown.
Three days after the deadline, the government of Turkmenistan announced that the State Service for Registration of Foreign Citizens (a body created in March) had been newly empowered to conduct operational investigations on the same basis as the police and security agencies. The new agency’s duties include "oversight of the observation of Turkmen laws by foreigners during their stay in the country;" it comprises units in major urban areas and border checkpoints, and will maintain a database of information on all citizens. (INTERFAX, 1517 GMT, 25 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0625 via World News Connection) This added fuel to the Duma’s fear that Niyazov would assign special security forces to track and harass former Russian citizens.

Ironically, the growing vulnerability of Russians in Turkmenistan has provided the occasion for several vigorous and overt declarations of Russian hegemony in the region. In defending his committee against Niyazov’s ire, Rogozin stated that Russia "has the full right to act as the protector of human and civil rights throughout the former Soviet Union" – not limiting himself even to the protection of Russian citizens’ rights. (INTERFAX, 1616 GMT, 17 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0617 via World News Connection) Other nations in the region would do well to watch the outcome of this standoff.

TAJIKISTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN
Consolidating presidential power
Elsewhere in Central Asia on 22 June, Tajiks went to the polls for a long-anticipated referendum on a package of constitutional amendments. The amendments included such important technocratic details as an extension of judicial terms and the introduction of fees for health care and education. Another amendment, much emphasized by government spokesmen as a consolidation of democracy, collapses the old official classification of parties ("religious," "democratic," and "atheistic") into a single, general "political party" category. (EURASIANET, 18 Mar 03 via www.times.kg) This further normalizes Tajikistan’s Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), the only legal Islamic party in ex-Soviet Central
Asia. However, the most salient amendment was that to Article 65 of the Constitution, expanding presidential term limits from one to two seven-year terms. (EURASIANET, 20 Apr 03 via www.times.kg)

The sitting President, Emomali Rahmonov, won his first term in 1994 during the thick of Tajikistan’s civil war. In 1999, just before the next presidential elections, a constitutional amendment expanded the presidential term to seven years, but limited the president to a single term. Rahmonov won the 1999 election, arguing that the single-term rule began in 1999 with the amendment to the constitution and did not apply to the five-year term he had already served. If he once again argues that new constitutional amendments mean new rules and a cleaning of his slate — an argument supported by the text of the new amendment, and already being rehearsed by his supporters in parliament — Rahmonov could run for two more terms under the new constitutional rules.

The opposition is generally livid at this prospect, though the IRP has agreed to take part in the vote "for stability’s sake." Several groups boycotted the referendum, insisting that Rahmonov had already had his two terms; others called on Rahmonov to explicitly declare that the amendment to Article 65 would not apply to him. No such assurances were forthcoming, and on 22 June, the package of amendments passed with a purported 93% "Yes" vote. The Democratic Party of Tajikistan accused the government of ballot-stuffing, estimating that turnout was closer to 20% than to the 96% registered by election officials (or the 53% required to validate the referendum). (INTERFAX, 0914 GMT, 23 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0623 via World News Connection)

These estimates can be neither confirmed nor denied by international observer agencies, which (in a pattern familiar from other referenda in the region) were invited to monitor the ballot mere weeks before the vote. The UN and OSCE both declined on the grounds that they lacked time to prepare a proper observer mission. Before the referendum, OSCE officials assured journalists that their
decision not to monitor the vote was "of a technical rather than political nature and will not affect its legitimacy." (INTERFAX, 1416 GMT, 20 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0620 via World News Connection) Afterward, however, a published OSCE statement suggested that the turnout of 96% was suspiciously high, and expressed regret that the opposition was not given adequate opportunities to air its views. (INTERFAX, 0941 GMT, 25 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0625 via World News Connection) Rahmonov, for his part, bluntly stated, "It is the people who vote for the Constitution, not international observers." Russian diplomats emphatically agreed that the referendum was a "purely internal affair," and that they would accept whatever results were published by the Tajik government. (INTERFAX, 1335 GMT, 23 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0623 and INTERFAX, 0736 GMT, 22 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0622 via World News Connection)

A similarly flawed referendum took place earlier this year in Kyrgyzstan, in a futile effort to bolster President Askar Akaev against opposition criticism. (See NIS OBSERVED, 22 Jan and 5 Feb 03) In recent weeks, Akaev has moved to consolidate the hypothetical gains from that referendum. His administration introduced a bill into the Legislative Assembly which guarantees that when his term is up, the "First President of Kyrgyzstan" will receive various perks, a generous pension, and (most importantly) immunity from prosecution for any actions or omissions while in office. (INTERFAX, 1117 GMT, 26 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0626 and ITAR-TASS, 0959 GMT, 30 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0630 via World News Connection) Two former first secretaries of the Kyrgyz Communist Party were readily given similar guarantees, though the Legislative Assembly balked at extending immunity from prosecution to members of Akaev’s family. The best that can be said for this law is that it encourages the president to leave office when his current (second) term is up in 2005, rather than hanging on indefinitely like all the other chief executives in the region.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the only two newly independent Central Asian states not to be dominated by the Soviet-era heads of their respective
Communist Parties. Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayev, Uzbekistan’s Karimov, and Turkmenistan’s Niyazov have all been centralizing and consolidating executive power since their first days in office – by blatantly rigged referenda, among other means. Akaev and Rahmonov have had to "catch up" from a position of relative pluralism and accountability. Their moves toward autocracy are rightly disheartening to those who had hoped to see Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan continue in a more democratic direction.

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