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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Putin's State of the Nation

President Vladimir Putin's address to the Federal Assembly on 16 May jarred few analysts with its content, although interesting speculations arose over his cursory remarks about military and media "reforms." The most intriguing element of his domestic agenda, as presented in this speech, appears to be his focus on the role of the legislative branch, and political parties in general, as a key element to further a broad series of changes.

Putin identified the massive state bureaucratic apparatus as a roadblock to implementing economic and social reforms — hardly a revolutionary idea in Russia or any modern state, yet Putin ventured further by emphasizing the need for developed, functioning political parties to filter down through the regions and frame the creation of the civic society necessary to change the state bureaucratic culture.

"The fully developed civil society will emerge only in conditions of a drastic cut in the functions of the state apparatus, of eliminating the mistrust between different social groups. (...) Creating such conditions without the vigorous participation of political parties is impossible. I consider the coming election to the State Duma to be yet another stage in the development of our multi-party system, development in the direction of greater openness of intentions, greater effectiveness of action, more responsibility vis-à-vis the people of Russia."(OFFICIAL KREMLIN INTERNATIONAL NEWS BROADCAST, 16 May 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

This praise of the role of the legislature, coupled with acknowledgment of the coordination of activities between the executive and legislative branches, may indicate a broadening of (yes, another shake-up in) the Kasyanov-led government. Certainly, many legislative leaders have interpreted it as such. It may also simply represent a nod to the Duma in expectation of greater compliance with Putin's agenda. In any event, aside from one notable outburst by a disgruntled Duma deputy, Putin generally is receiving favorable assessments of this address, which was so bereft of an ideological domestic stance as to make it appear malleable enough to suit the most diverse political persuasions.

Who'll stop the rain?

In preparation for the celebration of the 300th anniversary of its founding, St. Petersburg's grand refurbishing received a high-profile launch with a summit of European leaders in the full glare of the international media spotlight.

While there has been plenty of criticism of the restoration efforts as a return of the "Potemkin village" phenomenon, it is clear that President Putin is going all out to showcase his hometown. His plans include the preparation of an aircraft operation ready to seed and disperse the clouds should rain threaten to dampen his parade. (IRISH TIMES, 24 May 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Gref — Back in the saddle

At a meeting with key government officials, President Putin solicited proposals for the implementation of the broad goals outlined in his state of the nation address, highlighting the areas of energy and agricultural policy with an emphasis on preparations for next winter. Perhaps the most notable development at the meeting was not the anticipated innovative ideas from the cabinet, but the re-emergence of the controversial Trade and Economic Development Minister German Gref, who made his first appearance since his much-noted recent health problems. (MAYAK RADIO, 0900 GMT, 19 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0519, via World News Connection) Has he returned because he believes his job is now

safe? To save his job? Or just because he's feeling better? Time may tell...or not.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Scott Dullea

A new CIS security organization is born! But will it live?

In the dynamic restructuring of the international order following the swift US victory in Iraq, Russia has jockeyed for a position of enhanced power and influence in world and regional affairs. Seeking to assert itself as a global power, Moscow has cited additional motivations for reviving its sphere of influence: to maintain the ethnic leverage of the Russian diaspora, (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 30 Apr 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Market Database) to prevail along its own borders, and to counter the influence of rivals such as the United States and China.

Against a background of the US victory in Iraq and the continuing US presence in Central Asia, Russia has been concentrating efforts on reasserting influence and hegemony over former Soviet republics. This endeavor, though prosecuted in different arenas, is most visible in the birth of a new security organization resulting from the Dushanbe Summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) leaders on 30 April. Although technically under the auspices of the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST), the summit also comprised republics not formally part of the treaty -- Ukraine and Georgia. Additionally the Dushanbe agenda included consolidation of the joint anti-air defense system, creation of a single military communications system and a program of military-technical cooperation. The gathering had been preceded by meetings of the participants' foreign, defense and interior ministers in March. (ITAR-TASS, 30 Apr 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The new Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that observers of the conference described as a "security zone" (VREMYA MN, 29 Apr 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) was drafted a year ago at a meeting of CST member states as a means to improve their security cooperation. (WWW.PRAVDA.RU, 14 May 02) The CSTO's mission is to guarantee the security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of its members: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan. (TRANSLATIONS ONLINE MAGAZINE, 6 May 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) At the conference, Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka declared that the organization should attempt to contain NATO; President Putin, however, diluted that proposal by stating that the primary tasks of the organization are to combat terrorism and narcotics trafficking.

The details of the treaty make it clear that Russia will play a key role in the organization, thereby providing President Putin equal standing with the US president in discussions about Central Asian security. (VREMYA MN, 29 Apr 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Although the chief of the CSTO's joint staff will be appointed annually on a rotating basis (the first to fill the role will be a Tajik general), the deputy chief will be a permanent position, occupied by a representative from the Russian armed forces. Russia also will provide the leadership for the organization's joint Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) under Colonel General Nikolai Bordyuzha; the RDF is built around professional Russian air force units and elements of Russia's 201st Motorized Infantry Division. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 12 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The town of Kant, Kyrgyzstan will serve as the home base for the RDF, while the CSTO itself will be headquartered in Moscow. Russia underscored its influence in the arrangement by agreeing to allow other CSTO members to purchase military hardware and arms at the less-expensive domestic prices.

The CSTO is not the first or only security organization between these states. The Collective Security Treaty, signed in 1992, includes a military framework (the CIS Headquarters for Coordination of Military Cooperation); however, the treaty has never had any teeth. The director of the headquarters, Lieutenant General Vasily Zavgorodny, said that the new CSTO is not an alternative to his apparatus, since the two organizations have different functions. His organization's mission is to coordinate military activities of the CIS armies, while the CSTO aims to manage the RDF and fight terrorism and drug trafficking. (KOMMERSANT, 30 Apr 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Apparently inspired by the birth of the CSTO, members of another multi-state group, GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova), have begun to consider incorporating their own political-military role. (Moldova's participation is increasingly doubtful.) The presidents of Georgia and Ukraine agreed to appoint military cooperation coordinators in GUAAM, and are waiting for a reply from the other member states. Without a security guarantor of their own, GUUAM states have turned to NATO as a security alternative to Moscow. This relationship has resulted in financial benefits for the five states. (NEZAVISIMYA GAZETA, 12 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Indeed, Deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia Kakha Sikharulidze recently emphasized GUUAM's reliance on US financial support. (VREMYA NOVESTEI, 5 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) This growing relationship with NATO and the US may be partially responsible for Moscow's intensified efforts in the region.

Another venue for Russian influence in Central Asia is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China. The SCO, which until now has been a loose-knit discussion forum, also is invigorating its security role in the region. During a 28-29 May summit of its national leaders in Moscow, the group is expected to become a fully fledged, permanent international organization aimed, according to

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, at enhancing regional stability and security. Ivanov asserted that neither the SCO nor the CSTO was established to oppose other states or groups of states. Rather, the SCO is designed to develop cooperation across the territories of the member countries, focusing on political, trade, humanitarian and security cooperation. At the preliminary meetings in April in Almaty, the SCO established a regional anti-terror headquarters in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. (CHANNEL ONE TV, 29 Apr 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Another manifestation of Russian attempts at influence is the endeavor to create a Russia-Kazakhstan free trade zone. The members of the Euro-Asian Economic Community (Russian, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Tajikistan) discussed the concept of free trade zones in Dushanbe. Belarus and even Ukraine also may be interested in joining a similar venture. Also considered were the formation of a common currency and the community's simultaneous accession to the World Trade Organization. (ARGUMENTY I FAKTY, 19 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Whether these countries can carry through with their security and economic plans remains uncertain. Economic unity requires a level of economic maturity which may not be present yet, and security plans require funding, which Russia may not be able to provide. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 30 April 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The Dushanbe Summit may have given the breath of life to the torpid security framework of the CIS. However, Russia's plans may backfire; a more active, exclusive security alliance, combined with Moscow's attempts to unite many of the same states economically, may divide the already beleaguered CIS by impelling the states outside of the treaty organization to create their own security guarantees within GUUAM and pursue strong relationships with NATO and the US even more aggressively.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Kate Martin

ELECTIONS

Veshnyakov sees 'dynamic' development of electoral system

'Tis the season to think about elections: 15 gubernatorial/presidential races are scheduled to take place this year, as well as a new contest for control of the State Duma (the campaign season begins on 1 September). According to Alexander Veshnyakov, who heads the Central Election Commission, the electoral system in Russia is "developing rather dynamically." (TRUD, 7 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0507, via World News Connection) To be sure, the system has undergone substantive changes in the past few years, from restrictions on registration of political parties, to the removal of some local control over election commissions, to (proposed) stricter oversight of media during campaigns. The parliamentary elections scheduled for 14 December will be a clear test run of the new electoral system, and, as Veshnyakov has noted, the "stakes are very high this time. ... [T]he parties that prove their validity in the coming elections will decide Russia's policy for the coming years and maybe for decades. At the same time, those forces that don't make it through to the Duma will become bankrupt...."

The stakes could be quite high indeed. A proposal to base the government on the parliamentary majority, first discussed several months ago, now appears to have at least some backing by the president himself. In his State of the Nation address on 16 May, Putin said that he supports "the general course for strengthening the role of parties in public life. In light of the results of the upcoming Duma elections, I believe it possible to form a professional efficient government based on a parliamentary majority." (INTERFAX, 16 May 03; FBIS-

SOV-2003-0516, via World News Connection) The leaders of the United Russia and Communist parties, which regularly garner the most support in public opinion polls, were savvy enough to note the lack of detail in the proposal; so were politicians from other parties. Grigory Yavlinsky, the leader of YABLOKO, viewed Putin's statement as a thinly veiled threat to the Cabinet. "Although it is not clear on which principles this proposal [on forming the government] will be carried out, the most important thing is that it was nonetheless voiced," Yavlinsky said. Oleg Morozov, a member of United Russia and leader of the Russia's Regions faction in the Duma, reacted as though Putin's statement would not bring significant change. "I think the president meant that he would like to consult with those who make up the majority of the future State Duma," Morozov said. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 19 May 03; via www.moscowtimes.ru)

It is unlikely that the president envisages a stronger parliament at the cost of the presidential prerogative. However, regardless of what Putin may or may not have meant, success in December will translate into political power. One advantage on the national stage is that parties elected to the State Duma in the December elections can nominate their candidates for the 14 March 2004 presidential race more easily than other parties or private citizens. "A party that proves its credibility in the State Duma elections, in other words, gains the support of over five percent of the...ballots, will be entitled to nominate its candidate without collecting signatures or depositing a pledge," Veshnyakov said. (Interfax, 1344 GMT, 21 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0221, via World News Connection) Parties that fail to get into the Duma will have to collect two million signatures in support of their nominations in order to be registered with the CEC. "This is quite difficult, but theoretically possible," he said. (Individual citizens wishing to contest single-member constituencies also will require a large number of signatures.)

Veshnyakov's diagnosis about the development of Russia's electoral system appears to be relatively correct — on the federal level. International observers of the 1999 parliamentary elections reported only minor violations of election laws;

spokesperson Helle Degn, the head of the monitoring team sent by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), said at the time that Russia had "reached a new level on its journey to becoming a sophisticated democracy" and that polling across Russia's 11 time zones had been fair. (RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY, 20 Dec 99; via www.rferl.org) (Observers did note many instances of media manipulation, however. That may not be a problem during this election season, unfortunately, due to the absence now of genuinely independent media.) And Veshnyakov's commission has worked to develop the election system. But, while that system may be improved to usher in a new wave of democracy, the system can't run itself, and the participants may not be as quick to ride the wave themselves.

The legally allowable funding limits, for example, quite likely will be overlooked. While Veshnyakov noted that the limits have been raised since the 1999 campaign, public relations agencies reportedly are quoting significantly higher campaign costs than those provided for by legislation. For example, a party officially can spend 250 million rubles (roughly, \$8 million), while professional estimates approach \$35 million. Various schemes for circumventing these financial regulations are being considered, (VREMYA, 24 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0424, via World News Connection) but politicians cannot lose sight of the risk: A candidate for a single-mandate constituency who overspends the limit by 5 percent (R300,000) can face a court ruling invalidating his/her registration. Election results can be nullified if a party overspends by more than 10 percent the account permitted. (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 18 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0218, via World News Connection)

On the regional level, however, accusations of irregularities remain anything but rare. The Central Electoral Commission reports that there have been instances of election results being overturned for financial violations in Arkhangelsk and Chelyabinsk oblasts. Most allegations revolve around abuse of power. According to a candidate for the Bashkortostan State Assembly, A. A. Veremeenko,

"[u]nprecedented administrative pressure is being put on the rayon's electorate; people are threatened with dismissal should they fail to vote for the authorities' candidate and 'blacklists of condemned persons' are being compiled."

(Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 26 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0226, via World News Connection) Despite these charges, the elections — held on 16 March — were declared valid in all 120 electoral districts. Candidates backed by Bashkortostan President Murtaza Rakhimov ran as United Russia candidates; that party's representatives won 91 of the 120 seats being filled. (RFE/RL Russian Political Weekly, 19 Mar 03) Sometimes, the incumbent advantage has been used (slightly) more subtly: Authorities in the Republic of Mordovia declared that the prices of bread, gasoline, and phone calls soon would decrease significantly, thanks to President Nikolai Merkuskin, on the same day that officials announced the date of republican presidential elections. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 27 Dec 02)

Krasnoyarsk Kray offers its own special brand of democracy. The Norilsk mayoral elections had to be postponed from 4 May after the front-runner was expelled for alleged election violations; the remaining three candidates from the first round of voting refused to run. (ITAR-TASS, 0816 GMT, 30 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0430, via World News Connection) The elections might be held in December, a spokesperson for the city election commission said. (ITAR-TASS, 0735 GMT, 7 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0507, via World News Connection) Veshnyakov has asked for all documents relating to the mayoral elections, and has promised to examine the situation. (ITAR-TASS, 1432 GMT, 29 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0429, via World News Connection)

Irregularities in the kray elections are not unknown. As was previously reported, the Krasnoyarsk election commission nullified the results of the September 2002 gubernatorial election, which was won by Aleksandr Khloponin. When the Central Election Commission tried to force the local commission's hand, the latter appealed to the Russian Supreme Court. In the end, Putin had to intervene, appointing Khloponin to the disputed post. The Supreme Court recently rejected

the commission's appeal, leading to the group's disbanding. (ITAR-TASS, 1224 GMT, 4 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0404, via World News Connection) That is not the end to the troubles facing members of the local commission, however: The CEC has sent an audit team to examine how the commission spent federal funds. (ITAR-TASS, 0659 GMT, 18 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0518, via World News Connection) A new commission is being formed, and the CEC has suggested that a spokesman for Norilsk Nickel, Konstantin Bocharov, be elected chairman. Bocharov has promised that the territorial election commission "will stop to be a source of scandalous sensations." (ITAR-TASS, 1432 GMT, 29 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0429, via World News Connection)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Steve Kwast and Dan Rozelle

Russia's stranglehold tightens around Central Asia

On 28 April, the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Armenia and Tajikistan signed the final documents creating the Organization of the Treaty on Collective Security (ODKB). This collection of states will have its own budget, secretariat, military staff and rapid-deployment force. Its main military base will be at the Kant airfield in Kyrgyzstan. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 29 Apr 03)

This was a final step by the group of countries to transform a loose collection of ideas, with no real substance, into a full-fledged military-political alliance. This structure changes the military landscape in the region by giving Russia further authority and autonomy within the sovereign borders of its neighboring states. It also opens the door for Russian President Vladimir Putin to funnel more troops and materiel into that region without prior approval or consultation. All of these components add up to an increase in Russian control over its neighbors. The wide divergence between Moscow's official line and the rhetoric from other members of this alliance is noteworthy. Additionally, the group of six countries set

a 1 January 2004 deadline for establishing a headquarters for the rapid reaction force in Central Asia. This regional force reportedly will have 6,000 servicemen and over two dozen airplanes deployed in Kant.

The official dogma from Moscow is predictable. According to President Putin, "at today's session we finally agreed on military and military-political mechanisms, decided to form a joint headquarters and a rapid deployment force and made a decision on coordinating political approaches. The purpose of the Collective Security Treaty Organization is to guarantee the security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of its member-countries and should guarantee the fulfillment of the tasks facing the organization — resistance to international terrorism and drug trafficking." (INTERFAX, 0919 GMT, 28 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0428, via World News Connection) The same politically correct wording was reiterated by Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov: "[T]he signatories to the Collective Security Treaty Organization coordinate efforts in combating international terrorism and extremism, the trafficking of illegal drugs and psychotropic substance[s], organized trans-national crime and other threats to security." (INTERFAX, 1015 GMT, 25 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0425, via World News Connection) The Russians have learned that if they frame an issue as combating terrorism, fighting crime and preventing drug trafficking, the world community is more likely to lump its actions into the same category with the US war on terrorism. This tactic has been successful in Chechnya. Clearly, Moscow is hoping that such a strategy might allow this bold move to be minimized or unnoticed in the eyes of the world community.

But the comments from some of the other five member states about this agreement reveal more concrete purposes and intentions. Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka warned that "neither international security" nor coalition unity would benefit from "the attempts of some countries to break the current system of world order, to diminish the role of the United Nations Organization, to draw the dividing lines between the states on the post-Soviet area....the practice

'divide and govern' is probably effective for some period, but the results of the policy will bring no good for those who have voluntarily become its hostages." (BELTA, 29 Apr 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) This rhetoric speaks of much larger and more ominous aspirations for the organization. Moreover, Moscow's actions signal Russia's real intent. President Putin also held separate talks with Tajikistan President Emomali Rakhmonov and won his consent to give the 201st infantry division the status of an official Russian military base in Tajikistan. (MOSCOW TIMES, 29 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis) Such a side move adds one more element of control for Putin to act independently inside Central Asian countries.

The fact is, this action is consistent with Russia's pattern of control and insidious intrusion into the sovereign territories of former Soviet states. (See PERSPECTIVE, Mar-Apr 03) Moscow may have a well-run propaganda machine painting this collective security agreement as a fight against everything evil, but the truth is much closer to an even greater stranglehold on the political and military activities of Central Asian countries.

Russian Navy deploys to Arabian Sea

Russia's navy finally has made good on its promise, made at the height of the war in Iraq, to deploy to the region. A severe funding shortage is said to have been the main reason for the nearly two-month delay. Reportedly, some of the ships required repairs -- made on credit by defense enterprises -- in order to make the journey. (VREMYA MN, 16 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

On 10 April, almost two months after deployment was announced, the flotilla of ships from Russia's Black Sea Fleet departed Sevastopol bound for the Indian Ocean. The group, consisting of the Slava-class missile cruiser Moscow, the guard ships Pytlivy and Smetlivy, the Ivan Bubnov support vessel and the Shakhter rescue tug, transited the Suez Canal in late April, the first time ships

from the Russian Navy have done so in 15 years. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 3 May 03; via Lexis-Nexis) A sixth vessel, the landing ship Filchenkov, was scheduled to deploy with the group but was removed for unknown reasons. Three additional warships from the Pacific Fleet joined the Black Sea group shortly after the latter's arrival in the Arabian Sea. The ships from the Pacific Fleet include the Udaloy-class anti-submarine ships Marshall Shaposhnikov and Admiral Panteleev, accompanied by the support vessel Vladimir Kolechinsky. Those three departed Vladivostok on 6 April and arrived in the Bay of Bengal on 29 April. None of the eight ships made port visits during the trip. (KOMMERSANT, 30 Apr 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

The official reason for the deployment was to participate in naval exercises with the Indian Navy. The Russian warships joined with forces from India's Western Fleet in Mumbai (Bombay) on 20 May; actual operations took place on 23 and 24 May. The Russian ships are scheduled to move to the Bay of Bengal essentially to repeat the drills with India's Eastern Fleet on 1 and 2 June. During the exercise ships from the Russian Navy attempted to find an Indian submarine. A cooperative search-and-rescue operation was conducted. A missile and naval artillery firing was planned to complete the exercise. (VREMYA MN, 16 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

The exercises mark the first time that Indian and Russian forces have operated together. More than 70 percent of India's army, navy and air force equipment is of Russian origin and the exercises afford an opportunity for the Indians to gain insight into Russian operational, technical and tactical expertise, especially in anti-submarine warfare and air defense. Defense experts also believe that Russia is attempting to establish its presence in the Indian Ocean, an area long dominated by the United States through its regular deployments to the Persian Gulf. (THE ASIAN AGE, 15 May 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

... and conducts exercise that 'attacks' US

The warships deployed to the Indian Ocean also played a role in a much larger exercise that had not been mentioned previously. The exercise, designed as a strike at the United States, apparently is meant to demonstrate Russia's determination and ability to counter threats from the West. The military maneuvers, spread across much of Russia, included strategic bombers and nuclear submarines delivering hypothetical nuclear strikes against both the United States and Britain combined with locating and attacking a US Navy carrier group.

The premise of the war game, which took place 17-18 May, was escalation of a regional conflict into large-scale war. Officially the objective was to improve cooperation among Russia's navy, long-range strategic bombers and the various branches of the army while demonstrating the ability to conduct warfare on a global scale. According to Col-Gen Vladimir Mikhaylov, commander-in-chief of the Russian Air Force, one portion of the exercise involved "two Tu-160 (Blackjack) and four Tu-95 (Bear) strategic bombers [that] took off from Engels air base ...and headed for the Indian Ocean. The crews competently reached the assigned region and successfully completed the mission by launching two strategic cruise missiles from Tu-95 bombers that hit waterborne targets in the Indian Ocean." (ITAR-TASS, 15 May 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

Other events conducted over the course of the drills included ballistic missile launches by submarines of the Northern and Pacific fleets, additional bombing and mid-air refueling practice by other aircraft and destruction of various United States satellites. The warships deployed to the Indian Ocean were heavily involved in the exercises, participating in the air-launched cruise missile attacks described above and simulating attacks on a United States Los Angeles-class submarine and other enemy warships. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 14 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

...but ban on single hull tankers may limit Russian Navy's access

The sinking and subsequent oil leak from the Prestige oil tanker that occurred in November of last year may have had a serious effect on Russia's navy. The devastating results of the oil spill have caused France, Spain, Portugal and numerous other maritime nations to enact a ban that prevents single-hull tankers from entering their ports or approaching within 200 nautical miles of their shores. Apparently none of the Russian navy's tankers is of double-hulled construction necessary to meet international environmental standards. The lack of refueling vessels effectively removes the navy's ability to conduct long self-sustained voyages and prolonged operations at sea. (VERSIYA, 14 Apr 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Perhaps in response to the ban, the Central Staff of the navy has prepared proposals to build new auxiliary ships. Claiming that over 1,000 auxiliary ships have been scrapped since 1993 and there are plans to scrap an additional 300, the navy is trying to make its case for funding. No mention is made of the type of ships required but one plan would have the new ships employed in commercial ventures, with the profits paying for construction of future vessels. No initial costs are associated with the proposal since the ships would be built in India in exchange for Russia writing off a commensurate portion of India's debt. Because of the profit-making requirement, it is almost assured that the ships will be tankers. Reportedly, the navy believes that the proposal would make it possible to build one to two ships per year while earning an extra \$8 to \$12 million per year. (KOMMERSANT, 13 May 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Nadezda Kinsky

UKRAINE

Towards Europe, but with Russia

Ukrainian politicians have been attempting to forge a path to combine Ukraine's Russian ties and its future in Europe. In the last two weeks, several meetings have provided fora to state clearly Ukraine's desire to integrate increasingly into Europe without leaving Russia behind.

17 May was celebrated as Europe Day in Ukraine. In a televised address, President Leonid Kuchma said that "Europe is our home." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 19 May 03) He linked Ukraine's place in Europe and its striving for more definite European integration to political reform. Speaking specifically about the need to "be ready to give up the authoritarian legacy of the past," he used the forum and the context -- the majority of Ukrainians favor integration into Europe -- to advocate the political model of the parliamentary-presidential republic, "the governance model that is predominant in Europe." [Actually, it isn't.]

One day later, Russian Foreign Minister Ivan Ivanov arrived in Ukraine, where an Agreement of Strategic Partnership between the two countries was signed. Kuchma had asserted during his Europe Day address that the Ukrainian desire to move closer to Europe would not interrupt the Ukrainian-Russian partnership. The strategic partnership agreement does not sketch the form this partnership should take: Both Ivanov and Rada Speaker Vladimir Lytvyn noted that this needed to be formulated in the near future. Again, the ministers reasserted that Ukraine's European course was not incompatible with the Russia partnership. "We do not think that because of the distinctions in the choice of some other forms of cooperation with the European Union and NATO the interests of our two countries are opposed in Europe. ... The main thing is that Russia and Ukraine are interested in Europe forming the common expanse of security and economic development without any divides," Ivanov said. (ITAR-TASS, 20 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0520, via World News Connection)

Among other things, the Russian foreign minister discussed with his Ukrainian counterpart, Anatoliy Zlenko, some addenda to the Russian-Ukrainian border treaty. Both asserted that they would work for ratification as soon as possible, preferably simultaneously. The need to put these issues to rest, and particularly to complete the process of border delineation, also is vital to Ukrainian aspirations for NATO membership as well as its moves toward European integration.

Ukraine's foreign ministry state secretary for European integration, Alexander Chaly, spoke in Kharkiv about the need to retain ties with Russia and to finalize the forms of cooperation between the two countries in order to move forward on the European issues. He particularly referred to the need to choose between different and mutually exclusive models of economic integration--whether heading East, toward Russia and the CIS, or West, toward Europe.

The 21-24 May summit of 17 Central and Eastern European leaders in Salzburg - - the tenth such annual meeting to be held -- gave Kuchma another stage to assert his view that active European integration, as well as NATO accession, would not mean separation from Russia. Furthermore, he underlined support for a Russian future in Europe: "Separating Ukraine from Russia is as impossible as separating Russia from Europe." (ITAR-TASS, 22 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0522, via World News Connection)

BELARUS

If not at home, then abroad

Disappearances of former government officials, one media representative and one businessman in 1999 and 2000 have returned to the agenda of human rights groups and opposition politicians, highlighting the human rights deficiencies of the Belarusian regime.

On 7 May, about 80 demonstrators formed a human chain of "concerned people" in Minsk in order to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the first of these disappearances, that of Yury Zkharanka, former minister of internal affairs and a leader of the United Civil Party. In November 1999, another opposition politician, former Supreme Council deputy speaker Viktor Gonchar, and a businessman accompanying him, Anatoly Krasovsky, disappeared as well. A Belarusian cameraman who worked for a Russian television station, Dmitry Zavadsky, went missing in July 2000. The Zavadsky case was the only one that was ever investigated; the victim's family asserted that this investigation was biased and conducted insufficiently.

Also on 7 May, opposition politician Valery Fralou of the Respublika party announced the establishment of an independent commission that would concern itself with the investigation into these disappearances and the government's subsequent failure to deal with them legally. The commission consists of six persons -- four members of the Respublika party (Valery Fralou, Vladimir Parfyanovich, Vladimir Navasyad and Syarhey Skrabet) and two human rights activists (Hary Pahanyayla and Aleh Volchak).

This commission is openly considering the option of accusing Belarusian officials suspected to be involved in the disappearances. Evidence unearthed by a former government official (the Alkaev report, which was made public in 2001) links the disappearances to two former highly placed officials and a special police unit commander, who remained unnamed in the report. However, despite the media attention unleashed by the report, no criminal inquiry was begun and in 2002, the national prosecutor's office stopped all investigations into the missing persons cases. The commission believes that it would be able to accuse these officials and prompt an investigation through Belgian courts. Belgian law allows criminal cases to be brought against foreign officials if all avenues in their own country have failed to come to fruition because the country's leadership has not cooperated. Pahanyayla stated that "We consider these violent disappearances

to be illegal executions, which qualify as a crime against humanity." (IWPR'S BELARUS REPORTING SERVICE, 16 May 03)

It remains unclear whether a case brought outside the country would carry any weight in Belarus. Experts are skeptical as to the legal rather than political repercussions such a case really can have. Moreover, in order for a foreign ruling to be constitutionally valid in Belarus, all avenues of investigation and appeal have to have been followed in Belarus for each one of the cases. Still, even if there is no real hope for a verdict that would have a legally binding conclusion in Belarus, it would nevertheless strengthen the Belarusian opposition and encourage international pressure to be applied with respect to these cases within Belarus.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

CHECHNYA

Duma passes amnesty for Russian troops

The law on amnesty passed the first reading in the Duma on 22 May, Radio Liberty reported on the same day. The law grants amnesty to Chechen fighters who surrender by 1 August. It also exempts from prosecution Russian servicemen for crimes (except murder) committed in Chechnya. The amnesty came under criticism from liberal politicians such as Duma Deputies Sergei Kovalev and Aslanbek Aslakhonov. The former commented that the "amnesty will resemble a cleansing of massive proportions," and that federal authorities are not trying to "find a solution which would satisfy different parties, but are trying to subordinate the others ... the amnesty is the technical means of attaining this subordination." For his part, Aslakhonov commented that the amnesty did not contain any practical mechanism for ensuring the safety of Chechen fighters who may take advantage of it. According to Aslakhonov, the overwhelming majority of

those who participated in earlier amnesties subsequently were murdered by federal forces or by their embittered former comrades. (RADIO LIBERTY, 22 May 03)

GEORGIA

Shevardnadze on Russia and on retirement

Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze commented to reporters that he considers the regulation of the Abkhaz conflict to be the best route towards improving relations with Russia. Shevardnadze voiced hopes that his upcoming meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg would stimulate the formation of working groups on the Abkhaz conflict that were agreed upon at an earlier meeting between the presidents. Shevardnadze asserted that "Russia has important leverage with the separatists," which should be used to greater advantage to regulate the conflict.

Asked whether he is ready to retire and name his successor at the end of his term in 2005, Shevardnadze responded:

"Three or four months ago, I decided that there would not be any more politics for me. And then I saw how the opposition was behaving and began to doubt this. Some of our opposition leaders behave irresponsibly and can bring the country to ruin. When I sensed this danger, I changed my mind and formed a new political bloc. There are many who wish to join this political coalition. What will I do? I won't be president any more, and won't be a deputy -- I won't even be Deng Xioping, even though I knew him personally and had great respect for him. I think he made China a great nation. If we don't get a majority in parliament [in the 2 November elections] then we will come up with something else, but for now I won't discuss it. I won't name my successor at this time. I have some thoughts about this, but for now this is a secret."

He then went on to say that after retiring as president he intends to write his memoirs, which will describe in detail the pivotal events of the end of the Cold War when Shevardnadze was the Soviet foreign minister. (MOSKOVSKIYE NOVOSTI, 20-27 May 03)

New government party founded

The "new political bloc" to which Shevardnadze referred is "For a New Georgia," the political heir of the government party, Civil Union of Georgia (CUG), which made a miserable showing in the nationwide spring 2002 municipal elections. According to Moskovskiye novosti, "For a New Georgia" will leverage what is left of the CUG, the government's "administrative resources" (such as heads of presidentially appointed administrations, state-owned enterprises, state television and so forth) and those elements of the opposition that proved unpopular last spring, such as the leader of the Socialist Party, Vakhtang Rcheulishvili. (MOSKOVSKIYE NOVOSTI, 6-13 May 03)

US urges fair elections in Georgia

In a recent telephone call pegged to the occasion of the anniversary of Georgia's declaration of independence, US President George W. Bush urged Shevardnadze to ensure democratic elections this fall. (RFE/RL, 22 May 03) The same message resounded at a forum on Georgia sponsored by the Central Asia—Caucasus Institute of the School of Advanced International Studies of John Hopkins University. The forum, which was organized at the initiative of two former US ambassadors to Georgia, Kenneth Yalowitz and William Courtney, and included Ret. General John Shalikashvili (the former chairman of the US Joint Chiefs), called on Tbilisi to assure the mechanics of fair elections, including accurate voter registration, an independent Central Electoral Commission, full cooperation with OSCE monitors, transparent ballot boxes and other significant procedural matters. (Georgia Forum STATEMENT ON THE OCTOBER PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, 21 May 03)

AZERBAIJAN

Which Aliev will run?

The ruling party, Yeni Azerbaijan, had chosen its candidate for presidential elections this fall, the octogenarian and ailing President Geydar Aliev. However, Aliev suffered a fainting spell in front of television cameras in April, underwent treatment in Turkey in May and hardly seems fit enough for the electoral campaign, much less a term in office. Hence, the presidential apparat leaked to the press on 20 May, that the president's son, Ilham, would run for office. Other segments of the presidential apparat and the Yeni Azerbaijan party have denied this news, insisting that it was a malicious leak from the opposition. (VREMYA NOVOSTEI, 21 May 03) The daily Nezavisimaya gazeta pointed out that the son's candidacy is rather problematic because Ilham was not chosen as the party's candidate. According to the paper, the US does not have a preference in the Azerbaijani elections and only insists that the elections be fair, Turkey favors the oppositionist Isa Gambar and his Yeni Musavat party while Russia supports Ilham Aliev. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 22 May 03) However, last week the elder Aliev, a retired KGB general, was awarded the Yuri Andropov memorial prize by the Russian Academy of Security, Defense and Law Enforcement. (MOSKOVSKIYE NOVOSTI, 12-20 May 03) Which Aliev will the Russians prefer? Perhaps this will become clear after the CIS summit in St. Petersburg.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Joel Hafvenstein

The shadow of SARS

The past month has seen all Central Asian countries that share a border with China scramble to address the threat of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). To date, no SARS cases have been diagnosed in Central Asia; and, as of 22 May, the Chinese Ministry of Health denied that there were any cases in the neighboring Xinjiang region of China. (PRESS RELEASE, 22 May 03; via

www.china.org.cn) Given these assertions, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that "borders should remain open and that there should be no total restriction on travel and trade, but that people who can avoid nonessential travel to these affected areas should avoid making those trips." (EURASIANET, 10 May 03; via www.eurasianet.org) Rarely have such recommendations been so enthusiastically ignored.

Kazakhstan closed its border crossings with China early in May, and suspended all flights and trains; it was followed shortly by Tajikistan, which also closed its Kyrgyz border. (INTERFAX, 1044 GMT, 7 May 03; FBIS-CHI-2003-0507, and ITAR-TASS, 1029 GMT, 12 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0512, via World News Connection) Uzbekistan, which does not border China, promptly suspended all flights. (INTERFAX, 1245 GMT, 12 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0512, via World News Connection) Moreover, each Central Asian country attempted to identify and closely monitor those of its citizens and residents who had recently traveled to China or Southeast Asia.

Kyrgyzstan hesitated until 13-14 May, when it stopped all flights and closed its borders to Chinese imports and citizens, though exports to China were still permitted. Bus service between the two countries already had been suspended due to a March bandit attack. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 9 Apr 03) At the same time, Kyrgyz students and the families of embassy staff were recalled from China, and a 10-day window was declared for Chinese and Kyrgyz citizens to return across the border to their respective countries, after which time the border would be strictly closed. (ITAR-TASS, 0830 GMT and 1219 GMT, 13 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0513, and HONG KONG AFP, 0921 GMT, 14 May 03; FBIS-CHI-2003-0514, via World News Connection)

The inevitable drop in trade looks to cause more difficulties for the Xinjiang region of China (which exports half its total foreign trade volume to Central Asia) than for the Central Asian states themselves, which have more trade with Russia,

Uzbekistan, and even Germany than they do with China. (ZHONGGUO XINWEN SHE, 1351 GMT, 16 May 03; FBIS-CHI-2003-0516, via World News Connection, and WORLD FACTBOOK 2002; via www.cia.gov) However, Kazakhstan did reopen its border for commerce on 19 May, while extending the border closure for all other purposes, "pending improvement of the situation with SARS." (INTERFAX, 1333 GMT, 19 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0519, via World News Connection)

Caspian conflict

The five Caspian Sea littoral states (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan) continued to debate the division of the sea, its caviar fisheries, and its extensive oil and gas reserves. The countries' representatives met in Almaty from 12-14 May, and produced an agreement -- between Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. The other two republics refused to accept the principle by which the agreement was reached, leaving the final status of the Caspian unsettled, as it has been for over a decade.

The agreements of 1921 and 1940 between Moscow and Tehran treated the Caspian as a border lake, whose resources would be held in common by Iran and the USSR. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union coincided with the discovery of the world's third largest oil and gas reserves under the Caspian. The newly independent states of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan argued that the Caspian should be treated as a sea and divided into national waters (since their waters happened to contain most of the oilfields). (THE

ECONOMIST, 2 Aug 01) With Iran, Russia initially held out for the old system of common ownership; but Boris Yel'tsin changed tack in 1998 and accepted the principle of national division in proportion to each country's coastline, with reference to a median line.

Such a division would still leave Russia with access to several Caspian oilfields. Iran, by contrast, would get only 13-14 percent of the seabed and little oil. It accordingly began to demand a division of the Caspian into five equal shares for the five littoral nations -- an arrangement that would give it some of the oilfields claimed by Azerbaijan. (AFP, 21 May 02; via www.times.kg) Turkmenistan, which also contests several Azeri oilfields, has by and large supported Iran in order to avert an unfavorable final status decision. In July 2001, the Iranian Navy forced BP oil-exploration ships out of an oilfield that Azerbaijan was attempting to develop.

In February 2002, representatives of the five states hashed out a draft convention on the legal status of the Caspian. Based on this achievement, they set an April 2002 date for a long-delayed presidential summit in Ashgabat. (INTERFAX, 1545 GMT, 8 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0508, via World News Connection) However, the summit ended in frustration for all parties; Iran's Mohammed Khatami walked out when Iran's demand for 20 percent of the seabed was declined, and Vladimir Putin declared his intention to seek bilateral solutions.

Since then, against vehement Iranian protests, several bi- and trilateral arrangements have been forged or reinforced. Russia and Kazakhstan finalized their earlier division of the northern Caspian. On 13 May 2003, the Azeri parliament ratified a November 2001 agreement with Kazakhstan delineating their maritime border. (TIMES OF CENTRAL ASIA, 15 May 03; via www.times.kg) Finally, in the wake of the 12-14 May meeting, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia agreed to an interim division of the Caspian that would give Azerbaijan 18 percent, Russia 19 percent and Kazakhstan 27 percent -- roughly in proportion to the length of the countries' coastlines. (IRNA, 2028 GMT, 14 May 03; FBIS-NES-2003-0514, via World News Connection) Despite Iran's insistence, the principle of equal division was never taken seriously.

The disputed oilfields of the southern Caspian will remain undeveloped until some way is found to bring Iran and/or Turkmenistan into a final agreement. However, as the primary supplier of nuclear technology to Iran, Russia has a great deal of leverage. Nor has Iran been able to find a credible ally in these negotiations since Russia abandoned it in 1998. In a much-hyped March 2003 summit, the Iranian government failed to reach an agreement on the proper division of the Caspian with Turkmenistan's erratic President Nursultan Niyazov. (BAKU TODAY, 15 March 03; via www.times.kg) Niyazov's recent gas deals with Russia leave Iran even more isolated.

Meanwhile, Western investment in the Caspian region remains extensive; Moscow's 1998 change of heart seems to have been motivated largely by the realization that Russian oil companies (and Russian influence in its former empire) would suffer if the Azeris and Kazakhs continued to invite so much Western support and development. Since then, the Russians have striven to catch up. At a 15 May press conference, chairman of the Russian Union of Oil and Gas Industrialists Yuri Shafranik reminded journalists that "over 70 percent of the oil and gas in Kazakhstan are under the control of foreign companies," and declared that Russia "should seek to control 30 percent of the energy" in the Caspian region. (ITAR-TASS, 1418 GMT, 15 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0515, via World News Connection)

The demilitarization of the Caspian Sea, another of Iran's professed ideals, is unlikely to be realized any time soon. Russia continues to rearm and expand its Caspian navy, which moved from Baku to Astrakhan after the collapse of the USSR. Despite the claims of the Russian deputy foreign minister that this is merely a technological upgrade and not a "quantitative" increase, the Almaty Herald claims that "over the last few years the number of combat ships [in Astrakhan] has increased by more than 150 per cent." (ITAR-TASS, 1143 GMT, 14 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0514, via World News Connection; ALMATY HERALD, 17 May 03; via www.times.kg) The Kazakh military has purchased

ships from Germany and the US, and conducted unprecedented military maneuvers in the Caspian region. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 23 Apr 03) Even the Azeris have purchased dozens of patrol boats from Turkey. (ALMATY HERALD, 17 May 03; via www.times.kg) The common denominator appears to be that the post-Soviet republics fear the reassertion of Russian hegemony.

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