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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Michael Comstock

A quiet two weeks

Putin has been out of country for much of the last two weeks, visiting Poland; his absence could explain the relative quiet on the political arena. Of immediate concern, Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov has nearly concluded the investigation of Vyacheslav Aminov and it will be interesting to see if Aminov's boss, Aleksandr Voloshin, can survive politically. (INTERFAX, 0629 GMT, 11 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0111, via World News Connection) The liquidation of broadcasting company TV-6 also is proceeding apace. On 21 January, press ministry bailiffs served notice revoking the current broadcasting license of TV-6, prohibiting it from assuming the form of another corporate entity. This means that a new broadcasting license must be obtained should the TV-6 team want to regroup as a new television or cable corporation. (INTERFAX, 1511 GMT, 21 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0121, via World News Connection) TV-6 has been denounced by official Moscow as a mouthpiece of exiled politician Boris Berezovsky, who is one of the banner carriers of opposition to Putin. Although officials have denied that the actions taken to liquidate TV-6 were politically motivated, one cannot help but find a very peculiar correlation of interests, power and opportunity in this case. (INTERFAX, 0617 GMT, 22 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0121, via World News Connection) Ironically, while the last TV station beyond the Kremlin's grasp was going under, Putin was awarded the MUJ's (Moscow Union of Journalists) Prize for "Openness to the Press" with specific reference to informing the average Russian of state reforms. (ITAR-TASS, 0039 GMT, 19 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0118, via World News Connection)

Putin seems to be focusing his energy on foreign policy initiatives, citing the need for an alliance of Eurasian gas producers while in Turkmenistan, and supporting Brazilian accession to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council in exchange for military sales and support for Russia's own bid to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). (INTERFAX, 0957 GMT, 21 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0121, and ITAR-TASS, 2006 GMT, 14 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0114, via World News Connection)

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

Has the FSB finally gone too far?

Last month's conviction of journalist Grigory Pasko was only one of three high-profile Russian "spy trials" in recent months. Both Valentin Moiseev and Igor Sutgayin also have been convicted, with dubious evidence, on counts of treason and espionage. But Pasko's case especially has resulted in a spate of extremely public fora and debates by human rights activists, calling for FSB activities to be curtailed.

Because of direct support from President Vladimir Putin, the FSB for the last few years has been able to act with impunity in implementing its peculiar view of defending Russia's security. Now, however, it seems that the FSB finally may have overstepped its bounds.

On 16 January, a group of activists, including Lyudmilla Mikhailovna Alexeeva, chair of the Moscow Helsinki Group, and Alexei Simonov, president of The Defense of Glasnost Association, held a press conference at the Press Development Institute in Moscow. Their main goals were to publicize the tactics that the FSB uses in the pursuit of its aims, and to set out a list of proposals that would constrain the security services' power.

According to the information given at the meeting, the main reason that the FSB is able to act unhindered is that it remains outside Russia's judicial system. When Russia joined the Council of Europe in May 1998, the penitentiary system was to have been transferred wholesale to the justice ministry -- a condition for entry into the council. (FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, 16 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Membership was contingent on Russia's promise to fulfill this obligation. However, this transfer has not occurred and, lacking oversight, the FSB has been able to violate all the norms of a criminal justice system.

Holding its prisoners at the infamous Lefortovo Prison, formerly the headquarters of the KGB's 2nd Chief Directorate, the FSB determines legal visitation rights -- or the lack thereof -- for suspects. Furthermore, the agency pursues a policy of keeping defendants in custody for an indefinite period, so that, like Pasko, they have already served several months, if not years, in prison by the time their cases reach trial. This is in direct contravention to Article 5, Section 3 of the Criminal Code, which makes it illegal to hold a suspect in indefinite pre-trial detention. (FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, 16 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The criticism of the FSB by human rights groups is not new, and has become commonplace since Putin gained the presidency. What is new and important, at this point in time, is that even members of Russia's heretofore-submissive media have begun to criticize the FSB's power. Russian newspapers carried several articles in the last week.

Semen Novoprudsky, a columnist for Izvestiya, says that the FSB is behaving as it is because "Professional security officers want revenge for 'oblivion' under a previous President." (BBC WORLDWIDE MONITORING, 18 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Nor is revenge the only motivation. Novoprudsky alleges that the security services moved to close down TV-6 because of its links

to Boris Berezovsky, who owns 76% of the company, and is a "personal enemy of the special services and of Putin." Apparently, the FSB is trying to lure the oligarch back to Russia in order to arrest him. (BBC WORLDWIDE MONITORING, 18 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Ultimately: "The main objective of Putin's rule is simple control over his own people: when the service personnel of the punitive system begin steering the country, no-one cares about reform any longer."

Such a conclusion is hardly surprising. One hopes that President Putin may rein in the FSB a little. Unlikely though that is, the reassertion at least by a few journalists of the traditional role of the press is encouraging, as is the publication of complaints that the security services have gone too far. What remains to be seen is how the security services will react to such open criticism.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Luba Schwartzman

MEDIA

Time of death 00:00:00

The pulse of free television in Russia flat-lined at midnight on 22 January 2002, when, by the order of Media Minister Mikhail Lesin, TV-6 broadcasts were interrupted. For several hours the screen was blank. Then, the frequency was given to NTV Plus, which plans to broadcast the Olympic Games in Salt Lake City in February. On 27 March, the license will be awarded to the winner of a tender. (INTERFAX, 1015 GMT, 22 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0121, via World News Connection)

There is, of course, a story to this moral

The moral involves the oligarch behind TV-6, Boris Berezovsky. On 23 January, Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Nikolai Patrushev told journalists that the agency "has proof of Berezovsky's connections with Chechen fighters." This refers, above all, to the alleged financing of illegal armed formations and their leaders. Berezovsky is currently on the federal wanted list, but, according to Patrushev, the FSB will submit this information to its foreign partners in Interpol and demand his extradition. (NTVRU, 24 Jan 02; via www.ntvru.com)

Berezovsky reacted calmly to the accusations of "dealing with the rebels," noting that he cooperated with what, at the time, were legally elected Chechen officials, including Maskhadov, Basaev, Ugudov, Raduev and Zakaev; was involved in the Russian-Chechen peace process in 1997; and negotiated the release of a kidnapped OMON police officer from Penza. He also dismissed the threat of an extradition demand, saying that the general prosecutor's office has been making such threats for a year, but has yet to submit a single piece of paper to Interpol. As for the \$2 million Berezovsky gave to Basaev for the rebuilding of a cement factory in Chire-Yurt (Basaev split the money with Maskhadov and the factory was never built), and the money paid for kidnapped soldiers and journalists, he said these transactions had been covered previously in the media, and the current grandstanding was entirely political in nature.

Berezovsky suggested that the sudden seizure of the television channel was based on an outdated law used by LUKoil, and due to the planned broadcast by TV-6 of a new film would present the story behind the apartment house blasts in Moscow and Volgodonsk, which Berezovsky (and not only he) alleges were carried out by the FSB. He has been promising that he will provide irrefutable evidence of FSB involvement, and asserts that the shutdown of TV-6 was related directly to the government's desire to get even with him for this accusation. (NTVRU, 25 Jan 02; via www.ntvru.com)

A week earlier, after a number of top government officials, including Media Minister Mikhail Lesin, expressed support for the staff of TV-6, the crew thought that it understood the hint, and cut ties with Berezovsky. On 15 January, 50 leading journalists, headed by anchor Yevgeny Kiselev, established OOO (limited liability company) "TV-6." (NTVRU, 15 Jan 02; via www.ntvru.com) Unfortunately, this didn't help. At the last moment, realizing that the media ministry, which had already attained its revenge on Berezovsky, was not going to go through with the implied side of its bargain and let TV-6 survive, Kiselev tried to back out of the deal. He asked Lesin to recall the document in which TV-6 waived its broadcasting license in exchange for a temporary one, but the plea came too late. (INTERFAX, 1328 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0121, via World News Connection)

The anchors of TV-6's main programs have been invited to air their programs on independent radio station Ekho Moskvyy until they can win back control of their channel, but it is unclear whether the journalists will be able to shake the connection to Boris Berezovsky, which compromises them in the eyes of many citizens as well as of the government.

Now, following the logic of "where Kiselev goes, trouble follows," Ekho Moskvyy is next on the march route of the camouflaged, masked, Kalashnikov-wielding security officers. In addition President Putin's spokesman for Chechnya, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, announced that the Russian government will "closely monitor" Radio Liberty's planned Chechen-language broadcasts "and if we see that [they contain] calls for inciting religious, national, ethnic, strife or propaganda of terrorism [the government] will act in line with the law." Radio Liberty would receive a slap on the wrists for the first violation, but a second one could result in "the annulment of its broadcasting license in Russia and the closure of its bureau." (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 28 Jan 01; via Johnson's Russia List)

POLITICAL PARTIES

Berezovsky's party stronger than his media

Boris Berezovsky recently has enjoyed more luck in the political sector than he has with the media. His Liberal Russia party was strengthened significantly when four State Duma deputies (Viktor Pokhmelkin, Sergey Yushenkov, Vladimir Golovlev and Yuli Rubakov) jumped ship from the Union of Right Forces (SPS).

Berezovsky ultimately is looking to join forces with Grigory Yavlinsky's YABLOKO, a move that will bring much-needed funding to the party. All members of the Liberal Russia party will be admitted to YABLOKO, while Pokhmelkin will become a deputy chairman. If YABLOKO gains the necessary five percent of the vote in the next parliamentary elections, Berezovsky will have a new platform for political opposition to President Putin. (GAZETA.RU, 24 Jan 02; www.gazeta.ru, via Johnson's Russia List)

The Communists also are thinking about the parliamentary elections. The newly re-elected chairman, Gennady Zyuganov, suggests that elections might be held early, because of dropping oil prices and growing wage arrears. Zyuganov asserts that "the Communist Party has strengthened its positions over the past three years and has gained 55,000 new members," while the industrial growth in the "communist-dominated regions was two-three times faster than in Russia as a whole." (INTERFAX, 0727 GMT, 24 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0124, via World News Connection)

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY

Duma deputies face full plate, emptying glasses

Elections or not, the deputies will have much on their plate in the coming season. At a meeting on 23 January, the president and the prime minister discussed what bills should take priority in the Duma. These will include a draft banking reform, as well as bills concerning tax and pension reforms, the railways, electric power industry and the improvement of bankruptcy and business rehabilitation procedures. (ITAR-TASS, 1240 GMT, 23 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0123, via

World News Connection) State Duma Deputy (Independent) Vladimir Ryzhkov also named some top-billing legislation, including the Labor Code, a new Customs Code which would correspond to WTO standards, bills concerning agricultural-use land sales, and additional details of the judicial "reform." (See the article on the Security Services in the current NIS Observed.) (ITAR-TASS, 1403 GMT, 21 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0123, via World News Connection)

There is also a rather unorthodox bill that has been introduced by the Federation Council. Titled "On State Regulation of the Production and Distribution of Ethyl Alcohol, Spirits, and Alcohol-Containing Products," the proposal seeks to restrict the sale of alcohol to certain ethnic groups in Russia's northern regions, where "alcoholism among the indigenous people... has reached a critical point and poses a threat to entire ethnic groups." The parliamentarians cited similar laws in the northern regions of Canada. After reviewing studies of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Medical Sciences, which show that the death rate from alcoholism is 16 to 20 times higher among small ethnic groups than among other persons living in the same region, Federation Council members asserted that "alcohol is at the root of many evils in other Russian regions and it is necessary to consider some restrictive measures throughout Russia." (ITAR-TASS, 1048 GMT, 16 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0116, via World News Connection)

REGIONS

One district's solution

In fact, officials in one region have taken the matter into their own hands. The Ponazyrevsky district of the Kostroma Oblast' works on a system in which salaries are not given out in rubles, but rather as cardboard "money-cards" which cannot be used to purchase alcohol. The arrangement, which has replaced regular currency, has been criticized by the Kostroma regional administration, since the use of currency other than the national currency is technically illegal, but local officials and villagers are happy about never needing to carry money, confident in the triple-signature-plus-stamp security of the low-tech version of a

debit card, and pleased about the fact that alcoholism has diminished among the residents. (RUSSIA JOURNAL, 25 Jan 02; via Johnson's Russia List.)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Scott Bethel

Is Russia concerned about proliferation?

Despite assurances by foreign ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko that "Russia is seriously concerned about proliferation of weapons, including nuclear ones," (ITAR-TASS, 1533 GMT, 2 Jan 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) it is unclear whether Moscow's desire to operate a cash-and-carry arms trade is greater than its desire to limit the spread of certain types of weapons.

For years, Russia has been a major exporter of sophisticated weaponry to developing nations. Moscow has long-standing major arms deals with India and China for top-of-the-line hardware and has just concluded a huge co-production deal for the Ilyushin IL-214. This creates the fourth such enterprise between Moscow and Delhi. (ITAR-TASS, 1026 GMT, 21 Jan 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Russia also has increased its efforts to export arms to Central and South America, particularly over the last year, aggressively seeking increased opportunities in South America (and suffering a major setback there when Argentina collapsed).

Nor has Russia missed an opportunity to exploit the zeal of certain developing countries for nuclear capability. Moscow assisted several Central and South American states, including Brazil, in acquiring and building nuclear power plants. (NUCLEAR POWER, 21 Mar 01; via www.eia.doe.gov) Russia also seems willing to assist countries that seek to develop indigenous nuclear capabilities that could be used for energy or weapons. To this end, Russia is close to completing a deal

with Burma (Myanmar) to build a test reactor. (ITAR-TASS, 1357 GMT, 22 Jan 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) This is especially significant since Burma is virtually surrounded by neighbors already in the "nuclear club," specifically China, India and Pakistan. Finally, Russia has worked out a deal to continue its long-standing relationship with Iraq for dual-use military/civilian nuclear technologies. (INTERFAX, 1503 GMT, 17 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0117, via World News Connection)

All this has occurred against the backdrop of renewed Russian efforts to negotiate with the US about mutual reduction of nuclear arsenals. Recent talks between Col.-Gen. Yuri Baluevesky and members of the US Joint Staff focused on hammering out a proposal for accelerated reduction in nuclear arms. (INTERFAX, 22 Jan 02; via lexis-nexis) The Russians clearly desire to reduce their own aging arsenal, impelled by financial considerations (maintenance costs) and by the challenge of keeping such a large quantity of weapons secure. But that is all the more reason for Russia to continue to be a leading exporter of weapons and technology.

In the foreign policy arena, Moscow issues all the correct words concerning proliferation of both military hardware, and, perhaps more importantly, nuclear technology. Further, Russia has expressed concern that the US withdrawal from the ABM treaty somehow would increase the chances of further nuclear proliferation. However, it is clear that Russia uses the arms trade as a primary foreign policy tool. Moscow does not scrutinize the human rights records of the consumers or ask many questions as to the proposed uses of the weapons it sells.

Indeed, on occasion Moscow's exporting efforts fly in the face of its "participation in the war on terrorism." Certainly, a region's stability should be considered in estimating the bottom line profits of exporting technology. While Russia has announced its intent to support efforts to develop the nuclear research facility in

Myanmar, two Pakistani nuclear scientists purportedly connected to Osama bin Laden apparently have found refuge there. Moreover, imported terrorist sympathizers are not the only cause of concern in the area: In addition to concerns by the domestic opposition, Myanmar's neighbors, including Thailand, are worried about the military government controlling nuclear facilities. (DEMOCRATIC VOICE OF BURMA, 1430 GMT, 12 Jan 02; FBIS-EAS-2002-0114, via World News Connection)

Russia is likely to continue on this course and even to make increased efforts to expand its market share at the expense of the US. Russia can offer a developing country significant military technology without constraints on its use, unlike the US. Countries such as Iran and Iraq, among others, have taken full advantage of this aspect of Russian foreign policy and Moscow shows no sign of change.

Russia continues to side with Iraq

Feeling the pressure building for a possible expansion to its territory of the war against terrorism, Iraq hastily dispatched Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz to Moscow in an effort to rally support against potential US action. Aziz met extensively with foreign ministry officials, including Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov.

Aziz is most concerned with the apparent efforts by the United States to establish a link between the 11 September bombings and Baghdad. (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 12 Dec 01; via nytimes.com). He has appealed regularly to world leaders in an effort to garner support among countries within the counter-terrorism alliance. His goal is to weaken the resolve among alliance members to stay the course if Iraq is shown to be a supporter of Al Qaeda.

It appears that Aziz found a willing ear in Moscow. The foreign ministry's ambassador-at-large, Nikolay Kartuzov, said, "There is no evidence of Baghdad's complicity in the events of 11 September, nor is there proof that Iraq supports

terrorists." (ITAR-TASS, 1315 GMT, 22 Jan 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Aziz appears to have been able to keep Russia on Iraq's side. While Iraq has been a long-standing customer of Russian military hardware, currently there is something of a cash-flow problem between Moscow and Baghdad. Since the US-sponsored sanctions have been in place limiting Iraq's ability to sell its oil freely on the open market, Baghdad has withheld most of the money it owes the Russians, pending the lifting of sanctions. So, it is as much an economic as a political decision for the Russians to support Iraq.

Russia still wants to be part of the club

Russia still desires to be part of European-dominated international organizations such as the European Union (EU). During recent talks with European leaders, Russian President Vladimir Putin and his foreign policy team stressed the importance of increased cooperation. In meetings with the French president, Putin pointedly identified his goals: "I would like to emphasize that Russia is interested in the creation, as soon as possible, of a single security space in Europe and common economic, cultural, educational, and legal spheres." (RUSSIAN PUBLIC TV-ORT, 2030 GMT, 15 Jan 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Putin also continues to push for Russian membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). During the week of 21 January, the WTO met in Geneva to continue deliberations on whether to bring Russia into the fold. The organization has established a working group to examine specifically Russia's putative involvement. (ITAR-TASS, 1500 GMT, 21 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0121, via World News Connection) Russia already has close ties with the WTO by means of significant representation on important working groups, including those dealing with agriculture and roadworks; however, currently it does not enjoy full member status.

The main obstacle to Russia's viability in the WTO or the EU is that Moscow has not come far enough politically, economically or socially to be on a par with the other members. There are grave concerns in Europe over the recent crackdown on free speech. Foremost on the minds of Europeans are the recent "treason" trials of prominent Russian journalists and the forced closure of TV-6, the remaining major independent station. Also, Russia has not instituted sufficient market reforms to demonstrate to Europe that it is ready to compete with free market economies.

Putin is hoping to parlay his foreign policy asset as a supposed major factor in the "global war against terrorism" into increased status in the world markets. However, without some degree of confidence that extending Moscow an invitation to join the world's economic elite will mean increased profits and potential markets for Europe, it is likely that the notion of bringing Russia into the EU or WTO will remain a discussion point only. If Putin were to demonstrate that Russia is serious about reform and is prepared to loosen the "services" grip on the media, on the other hand, Moscow probably would be on the fast track to being part of "the club."

Russian Federation: Armed Forces and Military-Industrial Complex

By Walter Jackson

The 2002 defense budget figures are in

There really are no surprises with the details of the Russian Federation's 2002 defense budget. The debate was very vocal and very public. But many critics argue that the budget still falls short of meeting the military's needs. There are three main defense issues: modernization of hardware, quality of service and

combat readiness. In the West, support for one or two of these issues usually is underfunded to allow for speedy improvements of the other. How does Russia's 2002 defense budget stack up? Acquisition of new hardware is being delayed for years when "projections" indicate that the Russian economy will be better able to afford the substantial cost of replacing aging aircraft, ships and tanks. At a recent meeting with Russian ground force generals, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Col.-Gen. Nikolay Kormiltsev stated that "For the most part, funds will be channeled not into buying new models of weaponry and military hardware but into upgrading those that already exist." (ITAR-TASS, 1631 GMT, 16 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0116, via World News Connection) So the interim fix is to modernize existing aircraft, ships and tanks with new computerized navigation, radio and weapon systems -- a much more affordable alternative. But the interim fix for pay and allowances appears less promising.

Smoke and mirrors

The first major changes to the military payroll system are to begin this year. According to Russian Deputy Defense Minister Lyubov Kudelina, "military pay scales in 2002 will be equalized with salaries of state officials, or at least doubled." However, the actual average increase in officers' salaries reportedly will amount to only 35%. This substantial raise does not begin to cover the actual rate of inflation for 2001, or the cost of replacing the housing and utility subsidies that are scheduled to end this summer. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 21 Jan 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database) The projected rate of inflation (best case) is estimated to be 18% for 2002. The end result is a net loss for military personnel and the quality of life for their families by any accounting standard. So where is Russia spending the majority of its defense rubles?

And the winner is combat readiness

According to Kudelina, "most of the Defense budget will be spent on combat readiness and development of the armed forces." (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 21

Jan 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database) Thus combat readiness wins the lion's share of the defense budget, deemed the highest priority for today's Russian military. Not a bad choice if Russia perceives its immediate security challenge as the capability to engage, fight and win a war today. Clearly, to date the ground forces have performed poorly in Chechnya, and the naval forces still are recovering from the Kursk accident (a clear readiness issue) and subsequent Northern Fleet investigations. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 12 Dec 01) How much harder is military personnel willing to work to improve readiness, when living conditions (their number one complaint) remain poor? Brand new aircraft are great, but upgrading the time-tested "old ones" is palatable to most military professionals, for the short term.

There is no right or wrong answer to this delicate balancing act within the defense budget. The question revolves around priorities. One argument is that there is no immediate threat to Russian national security. Thus improving quality-of-life issues first might improve retention and morale-building in Russia's professional military. Second priority should be readiness, building an affordable short-term modernization program, and third priority is the acquisition of new hardware systems. As long as pay and housing issues aren't on the front burner, the military will not compete successfully with other employment opportunities and the status quo likely will be as good as it gets.

One good solution to troop morale

A recent Russian presidential decree supports military deferments for Russian Orthodox priests. According to Russian Orthodox Church spokesmen Viktor Malukhin, "it's obvious that it is impossible to reproduce in 10 years something that has been destroyed for 70 years." Having a chaplain in an armed forces unit "would bring moral relief to soldiers who serve under hard conditions, [and] help eradicate hazing [bullying], and would give active assistance to commanders." Regimental priests served in the military until the Russian revolution.

(INTERFAX, 1506 GMT, 15 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0115, via World News

Connection) Military chaplains have remained an integral part of Western militaries. US chaplains perform a vital role comforting personnel of all faiths. Indeed, most Western commanders will report that chaplains are priceless resources who play a critical role in maintaining a high state of combat readiness. Returning priests to military service would provide the "high moral fiber" needed to help commanders successfully combat hazing and other current inappropriate behaviors plaguing the Russian military.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Election roundup ready, set, go!

1. Viktor vs. Petro

As Ukraine approaches the official start of the parliamentary election campaign on 9 February, there is little doubt as to which groups will be competing for the largest representation in the body. According to four recent polls, Petro Symonenko's Communist Party and Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine bloc will head into the official campaign almost neck and neck, allowing for the statistical margin of error factor.

One of the polls, from the well-respected Social Monitoring Center, finds the Communists and Our Ukraine separated by only two-tenths of one percent. According to their survey, the Communist Party garners the support of 14.6 percent of the electorate, while Our Ukraine is supported by 14.4 percent. The third place bloc -- the pro-presidential, hastily created and vaguely defined Women for the Future -- follows with 7.3 percentage points. (UKRAINIAN NEWS, 23 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Another poll done by the SOCIS Social and Marketing Research Center came up with similar numbers. The survey, commissioned by Politychna Dumka magazine, suggested that Our Ukraine is leading all parties and blocs with 18.8 percent of voter support compared to the Communist Party's 16 percent. (HOLOS UKRAYINY, 22 Jan 02; BBC Monitoring, via lexis-nexis)

Meanwhile, two of Ukraine's other large research firms, the Democratic Initiatives Foundation and GfK-USM, found an even greater gap between the two. According to Novyy Kanal TV in Kyiv, Democratic Initiatives announced that 21 percent of its respondents supported Our Ukraine, while 15 percent supported the Communists. Given the small 1,200-person sample of the national survey, the statistical margin of error (not given in the report) easily might close this six-point differential. (NOVYY KANAL, 1100 GMT, 24 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The GfK-USM research firm released almost identical numbers, but with a larger sample. In a survey of 5,000 potential voters, the firm found that 22 percent of respondents supported Our Ukraine, versus 15 percent for the Communists. (KIEV POST, 24 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Despite the fact that another group is challenging the Communists for a nominal plurality in the parliament, it is doubtful that Mr. Symonenko feels concerned. The coalition created by Yushchenko is fragile, aimed largely at the upcoming election. This, combined with the habit of Ukrainian legislators to shift allegiances often, brings into question Yushchenko's ability to keep the group united after the 31 March election. Therefore, while many commentators are hailing Yushchenko's success, the hard work will come in April.

Much of that work will center on finding a balanced working relationship with the For a United Ukraine bloc. This new bloc of power, which includes Prime Minister Anatoliy Kinakch and is led by Presidential Chief of Staff Volodymyr Lytvyn, managed between 5-6 percent in each of the recent polls. Even though its

support is low, For a United Ukraine's political connections could easily make it the most powerful group in the upcoming parliament.

2. Yulia Tymoshenko, Round 10

One of the biggest surprises in the polls has been the support given to the Women of the Future bloc. In the three largest polls, the party receives between 5 and 7.3 percent of respondent support -- outpacing For a United Ukraine. Numbers can be deceiving, however. The group, which refuses to say from whom and from where it receives its funding, is thought to be closely aligned with President Leonid Kuchma, and by extension, with most members of For a United Ukraine.

So, why form a separate bloc? The answer may lie in Kuchma's desire to undermine support for Yulia Tymoshenko -- the country's most famous (or perhaps most notorious) female opposition leader. The new group, which its founders claim was created over one year ago, could be producing confusion among those who support Tymoshenko. As Women for the Future has seen a meteoric rise in its poll numbers over the last two months, Tymoshenko's bloc has remained in the bottom half of the list -- in danger of missing the four-percent target.

That may change soon. In recent months, because of criminal cases brought against her by the prosecutor-general, Tymoshenko had struggled against restrictions on media appearances and a travel ban keeping her in Kyiv. But those cases now have been dismissed. Just last week, Tymoshenko's request to have her travel restrictions lifted was granted by a Kyiv court. (ONE PLUS ONE TV, 1608 GMT, 25 Jan 02; BBC Monitoring, via lexis-nexis) She has begun traveling and campaigning aggressively to publicize her bloc -- the Yulia Tymoshenko Coalition. Whether she can resurrect herself and her supporters yet again remains to be seen, but there are indications she may be on her way to doing just that. [On 29 January, shortly before this analysis went to press,

Tymoshenko was injured in a motor vehicle accident, for which authorities are blaming her driver. She is reported to be in serious but stable condition, with head and chest injuries. Opposition leaders, no doubt, will demand an inquiry.]

3. What's in a name?

What's a party to do if it asks to become a member of Our Ukraine but is rejected by Viktor Yushchenko? Easy: Just get another Yushchenko.

On 25 January, the Yedyna Rodyna party did just that, when it announced that it had formed the For Yushchenko! bloc. Since Viktor Yushchenko had no interest in joining the cause, the party unveiled its own version -- a 52-year-old pensioner with absolutely no political experience named Volodymyr. But, not to worry, Volodymyr Yushchenko says, "I do not consider myself a pawn," and claims to respect the other Yushchenko "very much." (UKRAINIAN NEWS, 25 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Viktor Andreevych, shockingly, doesn't seem too impressed. He has asked the Central Election Commission to bar the new group from participating in the election, calling the attempt to capitalize on his name "dirty." (UKRAINIAN NEWS, 25 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

To drive home his point, he quickly dismissed the All-Ukrainian Workers Party from his coalition after the party placed a man named Oleksandr Moroz on the top of its list of candidates. The man, who has no relation to Socialist Party head Oleksandr Moroz, is an electrician from Kyiv. The party will now enter the election alone -- unless, of course, Yedyna Rodyna needs a little like-minded company. A Yushchenko-Moroz coalition, anyone? (UKRAINIAN NEWS, 24 Jan 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lanskoj

AZERBAIJAN

Aliev visits Moscow

During Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliev's visit to Moscow last week two important announcements were made: The sides are close to resolving differences on the status of the Caspian Sea and have reached agreement on the status and use of the Gabala radar station. In contrast to President Vladimir Putin's visit to Baku last year, which witnessed many declarations of mutual cooperation but produced no tangible results, this year's summit seems to move Azerbaijan toward closer relations with Moscow. While the US dithered about the nature and extent of its cooperation with Azerbaijan, the latter's maneuvering room to avoid undue reliance on Russia in the energy and defense spheres dwindled.

Agreement on Gabala radar station reached

On 25 January the Russian and Azerbaijani sides reached agreement on the status and terms of use of the Gabala radar site, which have been under contention since Azerbaijan achieved its independence. The Gabala facility is recognized as Azerbaijan's property but Russia owns the movable equipment it contains. Russia will lease the station for 10 years, at \$7 million per year, and pay the \$31 million it owes for the operation of the station from 1997 to 2001. Baku will provide air defense cover for the radar installation and Moscow will modernize the air defense system and provide new components. (ITAR-TASS, 1036 GMT, 26 Jan 02; via BBC, and ANS TV, 1700 GMT, 25 Jan 02; via BBC Monitoring) These terms are substantially better than those the Kremlin offered during President Putin's visit to Baku a year ago when he sought a 25-year lease.

Located 350 kilometers west of Baku, the station came on line in 1985. Besides being part of Russia's early warning system against the possibility of ballistic missile attack from the southern hemisphere, the station also controls all types of

aviation in the area. It was used for reconnaissance during the Iran-Iraq war, the Persian Gulf war, and the anti-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan.

(MOSKOVSKIYE NOVOSTI, 28 Jan 02)

Azerbaijan's leading opposition party, the People's Front of Azerbaijan Party (PFAP), issued a statement criticizing the leasing of Gabala radar station to Russia. To the party the act represents the institutionalization of a Russian military base on the country's territory, which may undermine Azerbaijan's security or even serve as a pretext for invasion. "If hostilities between our country and Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh resume, no-one can guarantee that Russia will not use the Gabala radar station in a way that runs counter to our country's interests." (HURRIYYAT, 23 Jan 02; via BBC Monitoring) Moreover, the presence of a Russian base in Azerbaijan only can undermine any possibility of a NATO country establishing a permanent presence, which has been mooted occasionally.

Talks on Caspian Sea status

On 24 January representatives of the five Caspian states (Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran) signed a communiqué on preparation of a convention on legal status of the Caspian Sea and agreed to hold the next set of meetings in April in Ashkhabad. At a 26 January press conference, Heydar Aliev indicated that this group, comprising the deputy foreign ministers of the five states, is close to achieving a concerted position. (ITAR-TASS, 1144 GMT, 26 Jan 02; via BBC)

Over the last three years consensus had been established on dividing the seabed into national sectors according to the generally accepted principle of the median line. This has been the position of all states with the exception of Iran, which would like to preserve the 1921 and 1940 treaties with the Soviet Union or divide the Caspian into five equal sectors. In the past Azerbaijan had sought national divisions of the water surface. The details of the agreement under

consideration by the deputy foreign ministers have not been made public. However, the process being undertaken now more closely corresponds with Russia's and Iran's ambitions rather than those of Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan, which over the last few years had sought to define the status of the sea through bilateral treaties. The conference process gives Iran greater leverage over the proceedings, in that it can exercise a veto to preclude development of the sea's resources.

At the same time Russia expects to increase its border guard presence in the Caspian. On 23 January, Russia's Federal Border Guard Service announced its intention to increase its sea-based forces in the Caspian. The service expects to add 10 ships and high-speed boats and reconstruct its bases in Kaspiysk, Makhachkala and Astrakhan. (ITAR-TASS, 1322 GMT, 23 Jan 02; via BBC Monitoring)

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Michael Donahue

More than a five-year plan needed

After nearly a century of wasteful management and a parody of agricultural planning, the once bountiful topography of Central Asia now resembles the surface of the moon, and it will take more than another five-year plan to correct. Of course, that is assuming that some of the future regional leaders care enough to begin the much-needed project: At present, none seems so inclined. As a result, the horrendous health problems resulting from the unnaturally arid climate and corresponding mineral deficiencies in diet appear likely to worsen before they generate the level of global attention needed to begin the road to recovery. One can assume, therefore, that the region's life expectancy, infant mortality rates and infectious disease rates will remain among the most pitiful in the world.

Despite the frightening truth about Central Asian health issues, rarely does one find adequate information available to endangered citizens. State-controlled media, stonewalling public officials and medical personnel, and a lack of public interest seem to be the primary reasons why few Central Asians know that their life expectancy has plummeted, their medical supplies and personnel have been gutted, and disease has increased almost across the board since the fall of the Soviet Union. Among the most troubling statistics, almost 80% of all (reproductive-age) women living in the Ferghana Valley of Uzbekistan suffer from anemia, which bodes poorly for improvements in the regions infant-mortality rate. (EURASIA INSIGHT, 13 Jan 02; via Eurasianet)

One of the primary reasons for this regional problem is the gradual disappearance of the Aral Sea. In the 1960s, poorly designed agricultural plans required a series of water diversions from the sea; as a result, it has been shrinking steadily and may dry up entirely in the not-so-distant future. (EURASIA INSIGHT, 3 Jan 02; via Eurasianet) Moreover, as ominous as the health and environmental issues facing Central Asia appear now, the legacy of Soviet domination left behind an even greater danger: abandoned chemical and biological weapons.

The desiccation of the Aral Sea exposes more and more of the former Soviet chemical and biological weapons test site of Vozrozhdenie Island. Despite denials that the site was used to produce offensive weapons of mass destruction, in 1992 former Russian President Boris Yel'tsin closed the site under Edict No. 390 -- which officially terminated all offensive biological weapons programs -- promising that within two years the island would be decontaminated fully. In 1995 the US Department of Defense confirmed that the laboratory had been dismantled, the infrastructure destroyed and the military settlement abandoned. (CENTER FOR PROLIFERATION STUDIES, 1999; via cns.miis.edu)

Unfortunately for the residents of Central Asia, the Americans performed only a cursory examination. Renewed American interest in the region as a result of the "war on terrorism," however, has netted a second chance for the troubled site. Recently the US and Uzbekistan reached an agreement whereby US troops will clean up Vozrozhdenie Island, where, it is widely assumed, scientists simply buried canisters of anthrax and other hazardous materials which still could contain live spores. (EURASIA INSIGHT, 3 Jan 02; via Eurasianet) Yet, while American decontamination efforts constitute an important first step to improving the conditions surrounding the island, they will have little effect on the region's overall environment. Broad-based improvements would necessitate new irrigation agreements designed to redirect the natural flow of water, which would require a concerted effort by all the Central Asian states, an effort none seems willing to make at present.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States

By Michael Varuolo

ESTONIA

Change won't change much

For the past several weeks, intense maneuvering by the political parties in Estonia has attempted to fill the void left after the collapse of the center-right coalition government of Mart Laar. While Laar, the country's longest-serving prime minister, had achieved success in the pursuit of membership in NATO and the EU, his coalition government was thought to have lost touch with many Estonians as well as the new president, Arnold Ruutel. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 8 Jan 02; via lexis-nexis) The collapse was caused by the ruling coalition's inability to maintain cohesion in the municipal elections of the country's capital, Tallinn, and left the newly elected president handicapped by a governmental power vacuum while the competing parties vied for supremacy.

Ruutel's response was to turn to departing Minister of Finance Siim Kallas. Kallas, confirmed as prime minister by the Riigikogu on 22 January, brings a sense of urgency and determination to Estonia as he forms the country's 10th government since 1991. Within Estonia, Kallas is well-known as an economist who organized the currency reform of the early 1990s and oversaw the transition from the Estonian ruble to the kroon. Following that endeavor, Kallas achieved political success with the liberal Reform Party, which he founded. (DEUTSCHE PRESSE-AGENTUR, 22 JAN 02; via lexis-nexis) But Kallas is not without his critics.

Despite his credentials as an experienced politician, any further reforms sponsored by Kallas will be challenged by the framework of the political system. Kallas' Reform Party, in order to assume power, has formed a coalition with the former opposition party, the Centre Party. The Reform Party was forced to concede one of its mainstay platforms -- opposition to a progressive income tax program. As Kallas explained at a party meeting in Otepaa, "If the Reform Party has to choose between going into opposition and the risk of introduction of a graduated-rate income tax, and forming a large coalition with the Centre Party, the large coalition must be chosen." (BAL TIC NEWS SERVICE, 1251 GMT, 12 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0112, via World News Connection)

Indeed, as Kallas moves to form a government, he has shown his need to maintain strong ties to the Centre Party. His government (named on 28 January) consists of five Reform Party members and eight Centre Party members. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 0835 EST, 28 Jan 02; via lexis-nexis) By populating his government with members of his coalition partner, he has ensured that the coalition will maintain a strong voice against the opposition and be able to sway influential parliamentary independents towards the coalition's priorities. (DEUTSCHE PRESSE-AGENTUR, 22 Jan 02; via lexis-nexis) Although this is a new government, with a slightly different political agenda, Kallas has committed

the coalition to continuing along the path established by the Laar government by seeking to further Estonia's bid for EU and NATO membership.

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