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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Yumashev takes over as Chief of Staff

President Yel'tsin named Valentin Yumashev to the post of Chief of Staff, replacing Anatoli Chubais who returns to the Government as First Vice Premier. Yumashev, a writer who formerly worked for Ogonek, has worked with Yel'tsin on his two memoirs. Most recently, Yumashev was a presidential adviser and active in the re-election campaign staff led by Chubais. Departing with Chubais is Alexei Kudrin, who was a deputy Chief of Staff and head of the Control Department. (See Government section for more on the Kudrin appointment.) Vladimir Putin, a deputy in the presidential Economic Management office of Pavel Borodin, has been named to replace Kudrin.

Yumashev steps into a very powerful position within the apparatus, which was restructured last summer by Chubais. Chubais folded the post of First Adviser into the Chief of Staff's portfolio after the departure of Viktor Ilyushin. As Chief of Staff, Chubais combined his access to the president with administrative ability to exercise wide-ranging authority. While Yumashev may already enjoy access to the president, it is unlikely that he will be able to wield power within the Kremlin in the manner of Chubais. No further major personnel changes are anticipated, however the interaction of the new Chief with his deputies may prompt a reshuffle. It should also be noted that Yel'tsin has, until now, spent very little time working with his new administration, and his return to the Kremlin could also spark changes to its structure.

RF GOVERNMENT

New team reflects Chubais' continued ascendancy albeit with clipped wings. While most of the elements of the new Government have been announced, the length of time in completing the picture suggests some serious negotiating for position. The initial round of reshuffling saw the removal of the First Vice Premiers Bolshakov, Ilyushin and Potanin. Of the Vice Premiers, only Valeri Serov and Anatoli Kulikov kept their posts; Davydov, Zaveryukha, Ignatenko, Livshits and Lobov were all dismissed. Ignatenko will stay on as ITAR-TASS General Director however. The Construction Minister Basin and Minister of Industry Besspalov were also removed, and their ministries dissolved. Zinovy Pak (Defense Industry) and Yevgeni Yasin (Economics) were likewise dismissed, although Yasin has been brought back as "minister without portfolio" after lobbying by the young reformers.

Chubais, as expected, became First Vice Premier tasked with economic management, but the addition of a second Vice Premier seems to moderate Chubais' control. The choice of Boris Nemtsov as First Vice Premier in charge of social affairs, housing and monopolies is interesting. His views are seemingly sympathetic enough to make an alliance with Chubais natural, but his ties to Yabloko and his own independent power base suggest a rivalry. Nemtsov claims to have been cajoled into considering the government post by a close relative of the President, which may suggest that Tatiana Dyachenko is indeed still actively involved in state decisions. (Komsomolskaya pravda, 19 Mar 97) Tatiana's involvement, coupled with Nemtsov's past criticisms of Chernomyrdin, make an alliance with Chubais more likely than one with Chernomyrdin, but time and circumstances may alter the equation.

The new Vice Premiers: Yakov Urinson; Alfred Kokh; Oleg Syusev; and Vladimir Bulgak suggest a strengthening of Chubais' position in economic matters, but may also reflect the lack of success in negotiations with Yabloko members. Nemtsov is said to be currently engaged with further talks to bring some members of Yavlinsky's circle into the government. On March 26, Chubais ally

Alexei Kudrin was brought into the government from the presidential apparatus. Kudrin is part of the St. Petersburg 'tail' that followed Chubais to Moscow following Anatoli Sobchak's defeat in the May 1996 gubernatorial elections. He is the deputy Finance Minister charged with revenue collection.

Chernomyrdin has stated that the government composition is 'virtually complete' but there are still several important posts to be filled. Chubais personally holds the post of Finance Minister, which is likely a temporary appointment. Also, the post of Minister of Foreign Economic Relations is still vacant as well as key anti-monopoly assignments. Thus far, the composition of the new government team indicates a significant weakening of Chernomyrdin's authority. The delays in finalizing the team may suggest back room bargaining to mitigate this effect.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Chandler Rosenberger

WEST

A Fresh START?

A meeting between the presidents of Russia and the United States that was to be dominated by a clash over NATO expansion instead produced a revision of the arms-control agreement known as START II and a proposal for a new agreement to be called START III.

U.S. President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin met in Helsinki, Finland from March 21 to March 22. At the summit the Clinton Administration agreed to seek extension of the deadline for meeting START II criteria for reduction of warheads. The deadline in the treaty ratified by the U.S. Senate is December 31, 2003. The new deadline would be the end of 2007.

Under START II, the United States would be allowed to hold 3,000 warheads, while Russia would be allowed 3,500. The Russian Duma has not ratified START II.

Clinton administration officials said they hoped the extended deadline would convince Russian legislators to ratify START II. To further sweeten the deal the White House proposed a START III deal with the same 2007 deadline, by which time the U.S. would be allowed 2,000 warheads and the Russians 2,500. Approval of START III would be conditional upon previous agreement of START II. (ITAR-TASS, 21 Mar 97)

The two presidents also signed agreements on European security, in which Russia maintained its opposition to NATO expansion, and economic reform, in which Clinton promised to seek more aid for Russia in 1998.

Primakov survives, meets Talbot first

Despite President Yel'tsin's pledge to install a reform-minded cabinet, Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov survived a government shake-up. In the days before the new cabinet was announced Primakov traveled to Washington on March 15 to negotiate pre-summit positions with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and President Clinton. Primakov first met with Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, who greeted him at the airport. (ITAR-TASS, 15 Mar 97). In an apparent slight, Primakov kept Albright waiting for 90 minutes (CNN 'The World Today,' 17 March 97).

EAST AND CENTRAL EUROPE

Russia makes plans for pipeline with Slovenia and Bulgaria

Russian diplomats have held the carrot of pipeline transit fees before the foreign ministries of two nations at either end of the Balkans.

On March 7 Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov promised Zoran Thaler, his Slovenian counterpart, that Slovenia would benefit from a proposed gas pipeline from Russia to Italy. Thaler promised that Ljubljana will send a delegation from the Ministry of Economy and Development to Moscow by the end of March. Thaler also said his government would always take Russian interests into account when conducting its own foreign policy. (ITAR-TASS, 7 Mar 97)

On March 10 Russian deputy Prime Minister Oleg Lobov discussed similar plans with Bulgarian Prime Minister Stefan Sofiyanski. In Sofia specific sums were mentioned; a pipeline would mean \$600 million in investment and millions more annually in transit fees, Lobov said. (Khorizont Radio Network, 10 Mar 97)

SOUTHWEST AND SOUTH ASIA

Russians fire on Turkish ship in Georgian waters, killing one

On March 14 Russian border guards fired on a Turkish fishing boat that had entered Georgian waters. One Turkish sailor was killed.

Nine Turkish fishing boats had entered the section of the Black Sea off Georgia's autonomous republic of Adzharia and had ignored warning shots, Russian authorities said. Russia's Federal Border Guard Service said the Russian troops were acting under a Russian-Georgian accord of February 3, 1994, on the status of Russian border guards stationed in the country. Turkish officials said the Russians had acted within their rights. (Interfax, 14 Mar 97)

Primakov denies shipping missile technology to Iran

At a press conference following a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on March 11, Primakov denied American reports that Russia was shipping sensitive missile technology to Iran. The U.S. State Department had protested that Russian technology would give Iran the capacity to strike at American troops in the Persian Gulf. (see Editorial Digest, vol. II, number 4).

Primakov also used the press conference to assert that Russia had only given Iran "light-water" nuclear technology, which could not be put to military use. (Interfax, 11 Mar 97)

NATO chief discusses cooperation with Kazakstan

Meeting with Kazak president Nursultan Nazarbayev in Almaty on March 11, NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana said Kazakstan could call on NATO for help with training officers and dealing with environmental issues and "emergency situations." Kazak officials said that while Russian opinion must be taken into account, NATO expansion was an inevitable process that posed no threat to Central European stability. (Interfax, 11 Mar 97)

Russia the right partner for Iraqi oil?

A joint Russian-Iraqi commission on oil production appeared likely to conclude with an agreement allowing Russia to develop Iraq's Western Qurnah oil field, Vladimir Karastin, Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Economic Relations, told Itar-Tass.

The store of the Western Qurnah-2 oil field is estimated at one billion tons. Annual output is forecast to be 35 million tons over 80 years.

The commission also seemed likely to result in two contracts for Russia's food and drug exports to Iraq under the U.N.-Iraq oil for food. Karastin said the children's food contract was worth 4.5 and drug supplies contract 2.5 million dollars. (ITAR-TASS, 19 Mar 97)

Comment

Three STARTs and You're Out

Leave it to the Clinton Administration to reward failure to sign one treaty with further concessions in a second. Despite White House spin about assuaging Duma deputies' fears, the arms-control agreements produced by the Helsinki

summit reveal a vast discrepancy between the way the executive branches of Russia and the U.S. view nuclear weapons.

To the U.S. administration, nuclear weapons are a relic of the Cold War to be bargained out of existence as quickly as possible. The administration therefore has no difficulty in unilaterally reducing both the number of weapons at its disposal and the range of any future anti-ballistic missile system.

To the Russians, painfully aware of the failures of the conventional forces in Chechnya, nuclear weapons remain their ticket to international clout.

Given that the Foreign Ministry of Yevgeniy Primakov has hardly used such respectability to promote peace and understanding, one wonders why the Clinton administration has not sought to reduce it. The Russians rightly see their nuclear forces as their queen on the world's chessboard. The American administration apparently believes the rules of chess were changed in 1991. Now the only respectable aim is to convert the queen into a pawn.

Pipeline diplomacy?

When Russian peacekeepers were deployed in Serb-held Bosnia two years ago, commentators noted that the end of the Cold War had given Moscow an opportunity that fifty years of confrontation had not -- a military presence in the Balkans. If the Russian foreign ministry is now promoting a gas pipeline to Western Europe that would pass through Bulgaria and Slovenia, one need only connect the dots to see that Russian cooperation in bringing ex-Yugoslav war criminals to justice is unlikely. Such a pipeline would have to pass through both Serbia and Croatia. Would Russia subject such an expensive and vulnerable project to the political backlash it would encounter if Moscow helped to capture, say, Radovan Karadzic? It seems far more likely that Russia, frustrated by the immanent NATO membership of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, is

switching to the 'southern' route to the West. Military and economic engagement is only a means to that end.

To be fair to Moscow, the Russian foreign ministry is only operating according to the "economic growth heals all wounds" playbook written by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Russian Federation: Political Parties and the Legislative Branch

By Michael Thurman

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY

Duma sets up committee to oppose NATO expansion

Chairman of the subcommittee for international affairs Sergey Glotov said the anti-NATO organizing committee would consist of 115 members of parliament of various political orientations. The committee will see that the State Duma discusses and passes bills to strengthen Russia's national security and efficiently defend its vital interests in Europe and the world.

The formation of single-issue groups in a legislative body the size of the Duma is not unusual. What is worrisome is that Glotov may be using the pretext of NATO expansion to expand Russian missile systems. On 29 January 1997, Glotov said that NATO's expansion into eastern Europe might force Russia to launch Oka missiles into full production. Oka systems were available with the Soviet army, however Mikhail Gorbachev ordered that they be destroyed, although they were not subject to any arms reduction treaty.

Glotov told TASS that the reason for suggesting the Oka systems is that their counterpart in the West -- the Spider missile -- will not be available for a decade.

Thus, Glotov's Anti-NATO committee will recommend that the Russian government put into full production the missile system to "restrain the unprovoked extension on the North Atlantic bloc to the Russian border". Glotov added that several divisions, stationed in Russia and Belarus, may be a reliable safeguard during talks on relations between Moscow and NATO.

As no proposed candidate for NATO expansion borders the Russian Federation - with the exception of Poland's border with the Kaliningrad Exclave --the meaning of this thinly veiled threat is unclear. The deafening silence from the West in response to these threats is similarly curious. (ITAR-TASS, 29 Jan 97)

POLITICAL PARTIES

One-third of Russian citizens support a Luzhkov presidential candidacy

The poll of 1,600 voters across the country was conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Center in mid-December.

Some 18% said Luzhkov's greater contribution to national politics would benefit the country. However, every fifth felt he could do more as the Moscow city leader. Even Muscovites offer greater support to the involvement of their mayor in nationwide politics -- 35%, still an almost equal number are afraid of losing a good mayor -- 36%.

Luzhkov is often listed as being one of the most popular politicians in Russian national politics. His presidential candidacy in 1999 is almost for certain. However, Yeltsin's former security chief Aleksandr Lebed is still by far the most popular politician in the Federation. (Interfax, 27 Jan 97)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By CDR John G. Steele

Arms Sales

The Philippines have expressed an interest in purchasing MIG-29's from Russia. Deliveries have begun of Su-30's to India -- 40 will reportedly be delivered by 2000. The UAE is close to a decision on the purchase of the U.S. "Patriot" or the Russian S-300V surface-to-air missile -- the deal could be worth \$1 billion. "Illegal" transfers of tanks, surface to air missiles and other heavy arms to Armenia was confirmed by the Russian Defense Ministry. Hard to believe such heavy equipment could have been shipped without some tacit consent on the part of Moscow officials.

NATO Expansion

The recent summit appears to have validated the idea that Russia will accede, despite the rhetoric, to the initial expansion (the DUMA passed -- 300-1 -- a resolution harshly critical of the proposed enlargement). Indeed, more nations are clamoring for involvement (if not outright membership). The Ukraine appears to want in, and to be willing now to say so explicitly. This may not be entirely unrelated to the increasing isolation of a more-and-more repressive Belarus.

Russian Military Woes

Strikes and civil disobedience at arms factories, local leadership threatening to sell nuclear submarines to "friendly" nations to cover debts, military academy cadets shooting instructors (allegedly over hazing), drunken border troops shooting their supervisors, uncertainty, contention and predictions of disaster from the highest levels, 500 Russian officers have reportedly committed suicide in 1996 -- all constitute recent developments in the Russian defense establishment. The Duma says the "democrats" have intentionally destroyed the Red Army. The government says the military must stop "whining" and reform, downsize and modernize with the resources they have been given. Reports are virtually unanimous citing the growing shortcomings of the Russian conventional forces, but it appears the nuclear forces (both submarine and land-based) have been largely immune from these travails.

Arms Control

At the summit Yel'tsin agreed to press for the ratification of the START II treaty, with understandings established as to the continuation of the process in a START III framework.

International Incidents

Russian border troops killed six on the Tajik/Afgan border, and a Turkish fisherman was killed in an alleged Black Sea poaching incident.

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Mark Jones

Two "Break Away" states request admission to the CIS

According to ITAR-TASS (27 Feb 97), Ikhvan Gerikhanov, Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Chechen Republic, declared "Chechnya is determined to reach an agreement with Russia on its accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States." Interfax (15 Mar 97), meanwhile, reports that the Abkhazian legislature sent a similar message to the governments of the CIS member states, saying that they too were ready to join.

CIS interior ministers meet to combat organized crime

Noting on 12 March that "arms and drug smuggling, contract killings, and financial wheeling and dealing have become signs of the times," NTV announced the beginning of a Council of Interior Ministers meeting in Chisinau designed to address these problems.

CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly ends work in St. Petersburg

During a meeting of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, members re-elected Russian Federation Council head Yegor Stroyev as its chairman. The

participants also adopted a statement condemning all manifestations of terrorism, including hostage-taking, and indicated that peacekeeping and assistance in settling conflicts are among the most important areas of the Assembly's work. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova insisted that the next session of the Assembly should discuss the settlement of conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and the Dniester region. (ITAR-TASS, 1 Mar 97)

OSCE official favors continued presence of CIS peacekeepers

In a 19 March 1997 briefing, ITAR-TASS quoted the Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Wojciech Lamentowicz, as saying, "The CIS peacekeeping force should remain in the zone of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, because it promotes the maintenance of peace in the area." Lamentowicz made the comments after returning to Sukhumi with Major General Babenkov, commander of the CIS peacekeeping force.

CIS militaries conducting joint operations

ITAR-TASS reported on 5 March that large-scale troop exercises were underway in the Siberian military district. Units from the Russian Antiaircraft Defense Forces and the Kazakstan Armed Forces were participating in the maneuvers.

Border troop commanders meet in Ashgabat

Commanders from all CIS countries except Moldova attended a session of the CIS Council of Border Troops Commanders in Ashgabat (Belapan, 14 Mar 97). The Council reportedly discussed about 20 issues concerning cooperation and interaction between units that guard the CIS external border. The Council also considered conducting an operation called "The Commonwealth Borderline-97," which will be executed simultaneously in all member states. The declared purpose of the exercise is "to prevent illegal migration and traffic in arms and narcotic drugs."

CIS Cooperation Minister Tuleyev comments on "integration"

Aman Tuleyev, Russia's CIS Cooperation Minister, revealed the course along which he would prefer to see integration proceed. Reporters from Argumenty i Fakty, in a interview on 4 March 97, asked Tuleyev to comment on economic integration. He replied, "What ever happens, we [Russia] need to maintain our influence in the countries next to us. The economy of the Russian Federation will improve in any case." Still responding to the same question, he continued, "I think that debts need to be paid back [to Russia] using the property of these [CIS member] states. If we had done this with Ukraine, then for a long time now no one would have been arguing about Sevastopol or the Black Sea Fleet or about Crimea. Crimea would have become Russian property a long time ago. . . You owe money to Russia? You owe it! Pay it back in the form of property."

New economic agreements are being signed by CIS members

Over the past few months, CIS members have been drafting and signing a series of agreements meant to increase economic cooperation. In November of 1996, the members drafted a document entitled "Agreement on Principles of Interaction in the Securities Market of the States Participating in the Commonwealth of Independent States." Another draft document will establish a CIS Finance Ministers' Council (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 23 Nov 96). The same newspaper also reported on 1 February that representatives signed a document entitled "Agreement on Supporting and Developing Small Business in the CIS Member States" as well as one detailing procedures to be used in applying both value added taxes and excise taxes on shipments of goods and services.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Alexandra S. Y. Kim

UKRAINE

Two million workers participate in a national strike

Mr. Tereschuck, Workers' Union Deputy Chairman, stated that twenty-three workers' councils will get ready for a national strike in Kiev on March 18. Demands of immediate repayment of wage backlogs, delayed pensions, free education, and health care will be made. (Interfax, 7 Mar 97)

Ukraine and Slovak agreements signed

On March 7, Ukrainian Prime Minister Lazarenko and Slovak Prime Minister Meciar signed 8 bilateral papers in Uzhhorod to increase cooperation in trade, economy, and science. (Interfax, 7 Mar 97)

Kuchma Signs Accords with Moldova

On March 11, Ukrainian President Kuchma was invited to Chisinau, Moldova to sign agreements promoting cooperation on border disputes. Kuchma offered to mediate in the Moldovan Dniester conflict. He assured that Ukraine will create the necessary conditions for the withdrawal of Russian troops, weaponry, and ammunition from the Republic of Moldova. The signing of the agreements marked the 5th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Chisinau and Kiev. (Infotag, 11 Mar 97)

BELARUS

Lukashenka established a Day of Celebration

On March 6, Lukashenka decreed that April 2 will be established as a Day of Unity. The celebration will recognize the formation of the union of Belarus and the Russian Federation which occurred April 2, 1996. (ITAR-TASS, 6 Mar 97)

Minister rejects EU recommendations on Constitution

Foreign Minister Antanovich rejected EU's recommendation that the Belarusian authorities should return to the Constitution which was in force prior to last November's referendum. EU states that referendum to change the Constitution was not passed through the Supreme Council as stated by the original Constitution but through the votes of the Belarusian citizens. EU asked that any

amendments to the Constitution should be adopted through the Supreme Council, a democratically elected body (which has almost ceased to exist following the plebiscite). Neither of these recommendations from EU were accepted; however, Belarusian authorities are prepared to talk about the EU's recommendations concerning human rights and rights of the free press. (ITAR-TASS, 6 Mar 97)

MOLDOVA

Dniester authorities suspend work of OSCE mission

Dniester authorities have suspended the work of the OSCE permanent mission in Tiraspol. The purpose of the mission was to promote the signing of the memorandum on fundamentals of Moldovan-Dniester normalization. Dniester authority, Litskai, states, "we are interested in cooperation with the OSCE but we want guarantees that work of the mission of this respected European organization is (...) objective, without interference in internal affairs." (ITAR-TASS, 11 Mar 97)

Moldovan President thanks Kuchma

Moldovan President Lucinschi stated to the press that President Yel'tsin assured him that "there are no problems involved in withdrawal of the Russian Army" from Moldova. Lucinschi said the Russian contingent will be reduced from 6,000 to 2,500, and 500,000 tons of ammunitions will be withdrawn from Moldova. He also thanked Ukrainian President Kuchma for the "great" role in the settlement of the Trans-Dniester problem and this "resolute stand" on the issue of Moldova's territorial integrity. (Interfax, 11 Mar 97)

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

Kazakhstan

Kazakh emigres are returning to Kazakhstan

The Kazakh Ministry of Labor's Dept. of Immigration has estimated that thus far, more than 5,000 Kazakh families have returned from abroad to resettle in Kazakhstan. Most of them have settled either in the southern regions or in Kustanai Region in northern Kazakhstan (Kazakh Television, 5 Feb 97).

Kazakh defense ministry will soon move to new capital

President Nazarbaev has approved a plan to relocate the Ministry of Defense to Kazakhstan's new capital, Akmola. A new building must be constructed to house the Defense Ministry, and until it is finished the ministry staff will work in shifts. The Defense Minister himself, Mukhtar Altynbaev, has stated that he will not move to Akmola until the president does, but several deputy defense ministers will relocate permanently to the new capital. All of Kazakhstan's ministries and departments are to move to Akmola by August 1997 (Interfax, 14 Feb 97).

Merchants riot in Almaty's main bazaar

An argument between a district police officer and a bazaar merchant who was allegedly violating market trading rules erupted into a riot on the evening of 20 February. Eyewitnesses reported that stall holders attacked a police contingent after one policeman kicked a pregnant woman. The riot reportedly involved at least 300 people and was finally dispersed by OMON officers (Radio Rossii Network, 20 Feb 97).

Kazakhstan's criminal code has been reformed

In an interview which was published in the Almaty Kazakhstanskaya Pravda on 26 February, Igor Rogov, President Nazarbaev's aide on legal affairs, described recent changes in Kazakhstan's criminal code. The changes include the decriminalization of certain activities such as engaging in private business, disassembly of a vehicle, and illegal hay making, which were considered crimes under the old Soviet code of law. Some crimes which were previously punishable

by imprisonment will now only be subject to fines, and the death penalty is to be eventually abolished, although women are already exempt.

Kazakhstan, Iran sign letter of cooperation

On 17 February in Tehran Kazakh Transport Minister Iurii Lavrinenko and Iranian Minister of Mines and Metals Hosayn Mahluji signed a letter of agreement to improve the level of trade, scientific and cultural cooperation between their two countries. According to this agreement, the National Bank of Kazakhstan will help an Iranian bank establish a branch in Almaty. The two countries also agreed to form a joint company to carry out telecommunications projects in Kazakhstan (IRNA, 17 Feb 97).

Presidents Nazarbaev, Jiang Zemin discuss economic cooperation

During their meeting in Beijing on 21 February, the Kazakh and Chinese presidents considered ways of expanding economic cooperation between their two countries. President Nazarbaev suggested that increasing the freight capacity of the railroad line between Druzhba, Kazakhstan and Alashankou, China might help boost bilateral trade turnover. President Nazarbaev also proposed that Chinese oil companies participate in the tenders for the privatization of Kazakh oil and gas facilities. He further stated that the two countries could engage in the joint construction of oil and gas pipelines from southern Kazakhstan to northern China (Interfax, 24 Feb 97).

Kazakh, Turkmen presidents sign agreements on economic cooperation

President Saparmurad Niyazov (Turkmenbashi) arrived in Almaty on 27 February for a meeting with President Nazarbaev. The two presidents gave final approval to 17 bilateral agreements on such issues as settling mutual payments, cooperation in small- and medium-sized businesses and investments, the exchange of economic and commercial information, and mutually beneficial use of Kazakh and Turkmen Caspian Sea ports (Kazakh First Program Radio Network, 27 Feb 97).

Kazakh foreign, defense ministers speak out on NATO

Kazakh Foreign Minister Qasymzhomart Toqaev and Defense Minister Mukhtar Altynbaev expressed their views on NATO expansion in interviews with Interfax-Kazakhstan on 13 February. Both men stated that they perceive NATO enlargement to be inevitable, but that Russia's concern over the matter should not be discounted. Defense Minister Altynbaev suggested that NATO's functions and perhaps even its name should be changed in order to ensure its role as a guarantor of peace and stability. Foreign Minister Toqaev confirmed Kazakhstan's commitment to continued participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and stated that Kazakhstan had no need to negotiate a special relationship with NATO (Interfax, 13 Feb 97).

Comment

Foreign Minister Toqaev's comment is most likely a reference to Ukraine's recently expressed desire to negotiate a special relationship with NATO.

Kazakhstan wants to expand economic, political ties with Ukraine

The Kazakh and Ukrainian Foreign Ministers briefed Interfax-Ukraine on the results of their talks in Kiev on 17 February, and outlined a few of the issues to be discussed at the second session of the Ukrainian-Kazakh Commission for Economic Cooperation, scheduled to be held in Almaty in March. Both ministers would like to expand trade relations between the two countries (current trade turnover is equal to \$300 million), including increasing Kazakh oil deliveries to Ukraine. Cooperation in their space programs, and in transporting oil from western Kazakhstan to Ukrainian Black Sea ports are two of the issues to be discussed at the next meeting of the Ukrainian-Kazakh Commission for Economic Cooperation (Interfax, 17 Feb 97).

At a news conference on 18 February, following the signing of a protocol on cooperation between the Ukrainian and Kazakh Foreign Ministries, Foreign

Minister Toqaev stated that Kazakhstan unconditionally supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and the inviolability of its borders (UNIAR, 18 Feb 97).

Comment

Foreign Minister Toqaev's strong statement of support for Ukraine's territorial integrity is undoubtedly directed at Russia's occupation of Sevastopol', and combined with Kazakh-Ukrainian plans to export Kazakh oil, could be interpreted as a sign that Kazakhstan is turning away from strengthening its ties with Russia.

Kazakh, Turkmen presidents agree on the division of the Caspian Sea

At a news conference following the signing of a number of bilateral agreements in Almaty on 27 February, Presidents Nazarbaev and Niyazov agreed that until the littoral states can reach a final agreement on its legal status, the Caspian Sea should temporarily be divided into national sectors, in order to allow its mineral resources to be exploited. Both countries recognize each other's right to develop their mineral resources on the Caspian seabed. The terms of this mutual recognition would allow Lukoil, Rosneft (both Russian oil companies), and other oil companies to participate in the development of offshore fields in the Turkmen and Kazakh national zones (Interfax Kazakhstan/Moscow Interfax, 27 Feb 97).

Kyrgyzstan

Committee to protect journalists censures Kyrgyz president

The Committee to Protect Journalists sent a letter to President Akaev in order to voice its concern over reports of the frequent harassment of the independent press in Kyrgyzstan. The Committee also protested the Justice Ministry's threat of legal action against Ryspek Omurzakov for his coverage of the Turgunaliyev trial (OMRI Daily Digest, 21 Feb 97).

Protest picket held to show support for T. Turgunaliyev, T. Stamkulov

The Public Committee to Protect Topchubek Turgunaliyev (this committee includes representatives of several political parties and movements) organized a

protest picket near Bishkek's White House (the seat of the government) on 17 February, in order to express their support for Mr. Turgunaliyev and for Mr. Stamkulov, whose appeals were to be heard by the Kyrgyz Supreme court the following day. Approximately 50-60 people turned out for the picket. They were met by a contingent of 30 police officers and told to move their picket to another location. The picketers relocated to Ala-Too Square, where they were met by more police officers, who issued two warnings to the protest leaders that they were in violation of the law because they were holding an illegal rally. Two of the protest leaders, Chynynbek Aitkulov and Turgunbek Akunov (head of Kyrgyzstan's Committee for the Defense of Human Rights), were subsequently arrested. Aitkulov was released, due to his poor health, but Akunov was detained for one day and was given a one-day non-custodial sentence in a trial without witnesses or attorneys present (Bishkek Res Publica, 25 Feb 97).

Kyrgyz Supreme Court commutes Turgunaliyev's, Stamkulov's sentences

On 18 February, RFE/RL reported that the Kyrgyz Supreme Court had decided to reduce the sentences handed down to Topchubek Turgunaliyev and Timur Stamkulov by a Bishkek municipal court early in January. Mr. Turgunaliyev's sentence was reduced from a 10-year prison term to a 4-year term, 3 years of which were suspended, and 1 year of which he must serve in a penal colony near Bishkek. Mr. Stamkulov's prison sentence was reduced from 6 to 3 years. Mr. Turgunaliyev's attorneys have already decided to appeal the new sentence in the Kyrgyz Constitutional Court (OMRI Daily Digest, 19, 28 Feb 97).

Kyrgyz government to support small- and medium-sized businesses

The Kyrgyz government recently approved a three-year program of state support for small- and medium-sized businesses. This support will include loans and a system of tax privileges. Entrepreneurs who are willing to take over bankrupt state enterprises will also receive tax privileges and will eventually be permitted to buy the enterprises (ITAR-TASS World Service, 27 Feb 97).

Kyrgyz parliamentary speaker supports Russia on NATO

Usup Mukhambaev, Chairman of the Legislative Assembly of Kyrgyzstan (synonymous with Speaker of Parliament), stated that Kyrgyzstan firmly supports Russia's position on NATO expansion, in an address to the Russian State Duma. He also said that although Kyrgyzstan is a member of the Partnership for Peace, it considers NATO membership for itself to be inexpedient (ITAR-TASS World Service, 12 Feb 97).

Uighur demonstration held outside Chinese Embassy in Bishkek

China stated that an Uighur gathering held outside its embassy in Bishkek on 17 February was an act of interference in its domestic affairs. The purpose of the meeting was to protest against a recent Chinese crackdown against the Uighur population in the Chinese city of Yining (on the Kazakh-Chinese border in Xinjiang Province), after a riot occurred there in early February (ITAR-TASS, 18 Feb 97).

Comment

Chinese officials have criticized both the Kyrgyz and Kazakh governments for tolerating the existence of Uighur separatist groups in their countries. The Chinese officials have blamed these separatist groups for instigating recent Uighur rebellions against Chinese authorities in Xinjiang Province.

Treaty on Kyrgyz-Russian dual citizenship ratified by Russian Duma

On 21 February the Russian State Duma ratified a treaty which would in effect grant dual citizenship to Russian citizens residing permanently in Kyrgyzstan and to Kyrgyz citizens who reside in Russia. The Duma also approved an agreement between Russia and Kyrgyzstan on immigration regulation and on the rights of immigrants. The agreement concerns the property rights of Russian citizens who have emigrated from Kyrgyzstan to Russia (ITAR-TASS, 21 Feb 97).

Kyrgyzstan plans to strengthen its armed forces

The Kyrgyz government recently passed a resolution to continue military reforms designed to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of its armed forces until 2005. One of the aims of these reforms is to create mobile military units and equip them with modern technology and weapons (Kyrgyz Radio First Network, 10 Feb 97).

Tajikistan

Tajik peace talks in Iran end successfully

Tajik Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov; deputy leader of the United Tajik Opposition, Haji Akbar Turajonzoda (UTO); and the UN Secretary-General's special envoy in Tajikistan, Gerd Merrem, signed a joint agreement in Tehran on 19 January 1997 to conclude the latest round of Tajik peace negotiations which began on 6 January (ITAR-TASS, 6, 19 Jan 97). The two sides were able to come to an agreement on three basic issues: on the procedure for adopting a mutual amnesty law; on the establishment of a central electoral commission to organize elections and a referendum; and on government reform and the inclusion of UTO representatives in the new government. They were unable to reach an agreement on the procedure for permitting the UTO's political parties to resume their activities. Nor were the two sides able to come to an agreement on how many members of the National Reconciliation Commission should be allotted to each side, although they did define the Commission's functions and powers (ITAR-TASS, 19 Jan 97). It was also determined that the commission is to have a total membership of 27 (Radio Tajikistan Network, 20 Jan 97). The Tajik government also agreed to allow the National Revival Alliance (political movement sympathetic to the UTO, led by former prime minister Abdumalik Abdullojonov) to be represented on the National Reconciliation Commission, but only if they share the UTO's seats. The date for the next round of peace negotiations was set for 26 February in Moscow or Tehran (ITAR-TASS, 21 Jan 97).

Refugee repatriation protocol signed by UTO, Tajik government

On 13 January representatives of the Tajik government and of the UTO signed an agreement on the process by which thousands of Tajik refugees currently living in Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan are to be repatriated. The number of refugees is estimated to be as high as 700,000 (OMRI Daily Digest, 14 Jan 97). The repatriation will take place over the next 18 months and a separate joint commission will be established to facilitate the process (Clandestine Voice of Free Tajikistan, 15 Jan 97). On 14 January Dushanbe Radio Tajikistan Network reported that more than 30,000 refugees had already returned from Afghanistan.

Tajik brigade commander violates presidential order

Colonel Mahmud Khudoberdiev, former commander of the First Motorized Infantry Brigade, and now the commander of a special rapid deployment brigade, led his men in an attempt to take control of Central Asia's largest aluminum plant on the morning of 8 January 1997 in the town of Tursun-Zode (located 54 km east of Dushanbe). Col. Khudoberdiev's troops clashed with a local militia group of about 250 men, led by Qodyr Abdullaev, Tursun-Zoda's police chief (Interfax, 8, 9 Jan 97) who has been in control of the town for the past year, after ousting the mayor, Ibodullo Boimatov. Abdullaev has claimed that Col. Khudoberdiev's attack was an act of revenge on behalf of the mayor's supporters. Col. Khudoberdiev, for his part, has stated that his intent was to end Abdullaev's terrorization of the local population, as well as to recover arms which Abdullaev's men had stolen from his brigade at the end of December (ITAR-TASS, 9 Jan 97). In any case, Col. Khudoberdiev acted entirely on his own initiative with his attack on Tursun-Zoda, without first obtaining President Rahmonov's consent, thereby violating the law. President Rahmonov immediately ordered Col. Khudoberdiev to return with his troops to their barracks in Kurgan-Tiube (90 km south of Dushanbe, in the Khatlon Region) by 4 PM on 8 January (Interfax, 8 Jan 97). Col. Khudoberdiev finally complied with this order on 11 Jan 1997 (Moscow ITAR-TASS World Service, 11 Jan 97), however, he reportedly left a small group of his forces behind, near the aluminum plant (Clandestine Voice of Free Tajikistan, 12 Jan 97).

Comment

This is not the first time that Khudoberdiev has challenged President Rahmonov's authority. Approximately one year ago he and Ibodullo Boimatov, the former mayor of Tursun-Zoda, organized their own militia groups and began advancing on Dushanbe. President Rahmonov was able to halt their advance by making certain political concessions which they had demanded. His most recent action does not bode well for the continued unity and loyalty of Tajik government forces. In fact, the possibility exists that Tajikistan may fall prey to a whole series of Khudoberdievs and Abdullaevs, who are more interested in self-aggrandizement than in creating a stable political situation.

Presidential commission appointed to investigate Tursun-Zoda events

President Rahmonov held a conference on the Tursun-Zoda crisis on 12 January, at which he appointed a commission to carry out an investigation of the clash at the Tursun-Zoda aluminum plant, determine who the instigators were and then assess the gravity of their actions (Interfax, 12 Jan 97).

New tensions arise in Tursun-Zoda

A new power struggle has developed in Tursun-Zoda. President Rahmonov ordered the Presidential Guard, led by Col. Gaffar Mirzoev, to replace the Security Ministry troops who had been guarding the aluminum plant in Tursun-Zoda, since Col. Khudoberdiev withdrew his forces. However, Lt. Col. Davlat Tursunov, commander of the Security Ministry troops, claimed that he had received no replacement orders from President Rahmonov, that he had the situation in Tursun-Zoda under complete control, and that additional troops were not necessary in order to maintain law and order in the town (ITAR-TASS, 16 Jan 97). The civilian population of Tursun-Zoda is also opposed to handing the town over to the Presidential Guard, and a group of approximately 400 protesters (composed largely of women) met Col. Mirzoev's troops at a bridge outside the town on 16 January and refused to let them advance any further (Interfax, 16 Jan

97). Col. Khudoberdiev warned the Tajik government against the use of force in Tursun-Zoda and asked that the Presidential Guard be withdrawn, as well as offering his services in resolving the stand-off (ITAR-TASS, 17 Jan 97). On 18 January President Rahmonov ordered Col. Mirzoev's troops to return to their barracks in order to avoid further unrest and bloodshed, after members of local militia groups exchanged fire with the Guard and a few people were injured (Interfax, 18 Jan 97).

Comment

This series of events raises the question of how much influence Khudoberdiev still has over Tursun-Zoda, and whether he perhaps had a hand in organizing the resistance to the Presidential Guard. It also raises the question of whether President Rahmonov ordered the Guard to withdraw at Khudoberdiev's urging. Khudoberdiev's base is in the Khatlon Region, which is close to the Afghan border. He could easily create a great deal of unrest in this region, and undermine not only the Tajik peace negotiations, but President Rahmonov's government.

Disarmament process underway in Tursun-Zoda

The process of confiscating illegal arms in Tursun-Zoda began on 25 January and is to be completed by 28 January (OMRI Daily Digest, 27 Jan 97). The Ministries of Security and Internal Affairs, as well as Col. Khudoberdiev's brigade, are responsible for carrying out the disarmament. President Rahmonov also established a special commission, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Abdurahmom Azimov, to monitor the process (ITAR-TASS World Service, 25 Jan 97). All those who voluntarily surrender their arms before the deadline will be exempt from criminal proceedings, according to the Tajik constitution (Dushanbe Radio Tajikistan Network, 27 Jan 97).

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