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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Michael Comstock

Putin scores high marks with commercial interests

One of President Vladimir Putin's goals has been to foster the economic recovery of Russian business. Now, whether or not this is taking place is not entirely relevant to Putin as long as the larger "oligarchies" that potentially may breed opposition to the Kremlin are kept docile. Recent analyses by foreign experts indicate that this goal may have been achieved.

As Russian business recovers, it expands abroad, and new markets open. This process can be judged indirectly by the volume of business handled by commercial law firms, such as White & Chase. In coordinating commercial laws between two countries, these firms constitute an effective control point in the network of global business. Following Russia's economic collapse in 1998, these firms were decimated. They have been steadily recovering since, and point to the Russian president as one reason for their recovery. In the words of one White & Chase managing partner, "Since Mr. Putin came to power, the level of political stability and corresponding economic stability has allowed our clients and therefore ourselves to function with greater scope and efficiency." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 23 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The long-term stability of Putin's policies has yet to be determined and may prove to be as transitory as the period ending in 1998, but in the short term at least, he has made the appropriate decisions, thus benefiting his own political base.

Trouble in St. Petersburg

A newly formed bloc of political parties within St. Petersburg's local legislature has charged that the Kremlin is actively interfering with the regional government

in order to set the stage for the 2004 presidential elections. As explained by a member of the new Yediny bloc in St. Petersburg, Vladimir Yeremenko, "there is a political movement to put a new governor in place [before the] presidential elections, and the center of this pressure comes from within the presidential administration." (THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, 24 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The Kremlin reportedly would prefer a governor more supportive of Putin at the head of such a critical region. The Yediny bloc considers this to be outside interference and has coalesced specifically to combat it. The bloc controls a sufficient margin to prevent the two-thirds majority necessary for the legislature to overturn a veto by the governor, and enough power to require the Kremlin-backed parties to negotiate with it on important matters relating to appointments and funding within the legislature. This activity does not constitute a full-scale rebellion against Putin's control, but rather a political tactic to enable the bloc to negotiate with the Kremlin for future benefits.

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Scott Fleeher

Grigory Pasko -- free, but not forgotten

Significant pressure from media sources and human rights groups appears to have culminated in success with regards to the case of the environmental journalist Grigory Pasko. As predicted (in the previous issue of The NIS Observed), Pasko was released from a hard labor prison camp in Vladivostok on Thursday, 23 January. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 23 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The Pasko saga began with his initial arrest and sentencing for alleged disclosure of state secrets in November of 1997. As the case progressed, the "state secrets" alleged by the FSB turned out to be scientific data that were readily available in the public domain. Without regard for the actual sensitivity (or

lack thereof) of the documents in question, Pasko eventually was sentenced for treason to a four-year prison term. Following his final conviction, Pasko was offered an amnesty, which he rejected flatly as amounting to an admission of guilt. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 22 Jan 03)

Following his release for good behavior by a local court in Ussuriisk, Pasko stated, "I am overjoyed that at last I am free, and I thank all those who supported me during all these years." He indicated that his release would not end the controversy regarding his arrest and incarceration. "I still have a battle ahead of me to prove my innocence," Pasko announced. The newly free journalist added that he would present an appeal to the Russian Supreme Court, and vowed to put his case before the European Court of Human Rights, if necessary. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 23 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

It is unlikely that an appeal to the Russian Supreme Court will have a favorable result; the court previously had upheld his conviction. However, continued vigilance by human rights groups such as Amnesty International and the Glasnost Defense Foundation is certain to sustain a considerable amount of attention to his case. Sergei Grigoriants of the Glasnost Defense Foundation summed up his organization's position: "This is excellent news. But it is important that the sentence is quashed... [R]ecently, there have not been any more cases such as this fabricated by the FSB. Let's hope the authorities understand their futility." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 23 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Prosecutors for the state continue to maintain that Pasko is guilty, and have not ruled out an appeal of their own. In a final assault on the truth, an official of the justice ministry posed yet another attack on Pasko and his innocence. In an interview with Interfax, the official indicated (incorrectly) that only prisoners who have admitted their guilt are eligible for parole (as opposed to amnesty). (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 23 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

'Spymania' -- old tactics, new name

Together with the conclusion of one "act" of the Pasko drama, a second, yet no less visible, series of blunders by the FSB continues to unfold. "Spymania" has arrived in Russia. Is this a new phenomenon -- or simply another name for the status quo?

During a recent press conference organized by the Helsinki Group on human rights, prominent Russian scientists condemned state officials (and indirectly the FSB) for "creating serious problems for Russia's scientific community and damaging the country's prospects as a center of research." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 30 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The scientists characterized recent prosecutions and trials of several prominent researchers as part of the "Soviet mentality" which has led to increased trepidation that research in "sensitive" areas might lead the security services to suspect scientists of espionage. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 30 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Meeting in Moscow, the scientists (including two members of the prestigious Russian Academy of Arts and Sciences) pointed to the case of their colleague, Igor Sutyagin, who has been in jail since 1999 while awaiting trial on charges of passing secrets to the United States. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 30 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) A trial date has yet to be set. If "proven" guilty, Sutyagin could face between 12 and 20 years in prison; however, at the current pace, Sutyagin will have served any putative sentence well before he is formally indicted.

Do as you like, not as I say

In an address to a large gathering of FSB officials in Moscow, President Vladimir Putin stressed that the priorities for today's security service have not really changed. In theory, the principles of "protecting the state and society from

outside and internal threats" (synonymous with humanitarian aid workers, journalists and Russian scientists), "observing the rights of citizens and democratic values" (Pasko, Sutyagin,...?), and "maintaining Russia's national security" as enumerated by Putin are by no means new planks in the FSB platform. (ITAR-TASS, 31 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Regrettably, little has changed over the years. A 1997 assessment by J. Michael Waller of the American Foreign Policy Council contained many parallels with the current exploits of the security services. Waller listed the following abrogations of the security service's constitutional mandate to "safeguard the human rights of all citizens of the Russian Federation": harassment, defamation, legal as well as extrajudicial persecution of critics; curtailed freedom of the press; restrictions on religious freedom; torture; and murder. All of these issues were supposed to have been addressed under the auspices of a framework for change referred to as the "Bakatin Reforms." (PERSPECTIVE, September-October 1997) While the FSB and other arms of the security services unquestionably have undergone numerous name changes and bureaucratic reorganizations over recent years, the reform goals remain as elusive today as they were in 1997.

Too little, too late

Alas, Putin's recent emphasis on humanitarian treatment and respect for human rights may have been reintroduced and reemphasized to his colleagues of the FSB just a few weeks too late for practical application. The confidential personal information of millions of Russian mobile telephone subscribers reportedly was "leaked" from a subscriber database, raising yet another controversy for the FSB. The information --which includes name, date of birth, passport number, residence, and employment data (among other personal details) -- reportedly is being sold in Moscow (as a database) for 2,000 rubles or less. (WPS, 29 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) According to Mobile TeleSystems (MTS), the confidential customer information in question may have been leaked through the FSB.

Access to the MTS database was granted to the security services during the Dubrovka theater hostage drama in Moscow; the FSB used the data after monitoring outgoing mobile telephone calls from the besieged theater. (In fact, for several years the FSB has been monitoring electronic traffic through the compulsory installation of the SORM program in all Internet servers.) In reference to the compromised data, Eva Prokofieva, a press secretary for MTS, stated, "In compliance with the law, operators must provide security agencies with confidential information about subscribers. We could not refuse to disclose this information to the FSB." (WPS, 29 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Of course, that does not mean that the security service necessarily was the culprit selling the information. As an unnamed expert on information protection (also from MTS) explained, "An information leak through the security agencies is quite probable, however, I would also consider another possibility. Customer data could have leaked through some of the company's employees, or through a break into the MTS database through outside channels." (WPS, 29 Jan 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Conclusive evidence as to who exactly released the confidential information from the MTS database has yet to be presented. Still, the fact remains that the FSB has access to the data, by default moving its agents to the top of the suspect list as the investigation continues.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Ansel Stein

Who's in charge?

Speaking at a St. Petersburg conference on "Globalization and National Self-Determination," Russian political scientist Sergei Kurginyan declared last week that "the integration of Russia into the international community and the

preservation of Russia's integrity as a state are mutually exclusive goals." His views were bolstered by those of St. Petersburg State University Professor Aleksandr Kuropyatnik, who declared at the conference: "If we strive for a global community, we will lose Russian values." (RFE/RL SECURITY AND TERRORISM WATCH, 22 Jan 03) Kurginyan and Kuropyatnik's concern about the threat of the global community is one thing, but another is the tendency to define Russian foreign policy in anti-US terms, as illustrated, to some extent, by the Iraq crisis. This situation is somewhat reminiscent of Cold War-era Soviet policy, but there is a significant difference: Earlier, countries such as Iraq had their foreign policy conform with the interests of the Soviet Union. The dynamic has changed.

In the past few months Russia has sent its representatives around the world, announcing that Russian foreign policy and that of the host countries in question conform in entirety, especially with regard to America's most important diplomatic moves. The question now is whether states such as Iraq, China, Iran and France are bending their foreign policy to conform to that of Russia or vice versa? Even prior to Hans Blix's report to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Moscow declared that international inspectors should continue working in Iraq regardless of their findings. A "high-ranking Russian diplomat" asserted that "an inspector's report cannot be the justifying reason for using force [against Iraq]. There must be no such actions at all." Regarding accusations that Iraq is concealing weapons of mass destruction, the source noted that "Moscow is not inclined to exaggerate the significance of this declaration. After all, it is only one source of information for the fulfillment of the UNMOVIC's mandate, although it is an important one... If Iraq's declaration has some blank spaces, they must be filled in patiently and consistently." (INTERFAX, 1022 GMT, 23 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0123, via World News Connection)

If Russia will not base its decisions on UNMOVIC reporting, what will form the basis of its foreign policy? Had Hans Blix made a declaration favorable to Iraq, of

course, Russia's stance might have been different. Since Blix's report contained serious criticisms of Iraq, Russia simply is lining up with France and others to avoid compelling Iraq to disarm. Why else would Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov have spent the period leading up to the passage of Resolution 1441 declaring that "several months of work will be more than enough to get a final result. It may also be discovered...that such weapons are not to be found there..."? (RZECZPOSPOLITA, 25 Sep 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0925, via World News Connection) Inspectors have been active in Iraq for more than two months; now Ivanov asserts that they simply need more time.

In addition, Moscow has argued that there are more pressing diplomatic issues facing the world than confronting Iraq. Addressing a special session of the UNSC which discussed ways to fight terrorism, Ivanov declared that unilateral moves against Iraq could "endanger the unity of the anti-terrorist coalition." (ITAR-TASS, 2006 GMT, 20 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0121, via World News Connection) Russia is bending its foreign policy to conform to that of a petty third-world dictator, against its own best interests. Russia might suffer more from leaving the "anti-terrorist coalition" than the latter would suffer from Russia's departure. Moscow has been allowed something of a free hand concerning its operations in Chechnya and enjoyed "flattering words" from American officials at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos; moreover, its stature as a world power has been raised by US efforts to maintain the anti-terror coalition. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 28 Jan 03; FBIS-NES-2003-0128, via World News Connection) It remains to be seen how Russia will react to America's presentation of data concerning Iraq's violations of its international commitments.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Kate Martin

'Eagle'-eyed oversight?

The US government recently expressed its concern for the future of a free press in Russia. (INTERFAX, 1058 GMT, 20 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0120, via World News Connection) However, the caution came not because of apparent FSB incursions into what the media could cover without being charged with treason, not because of attacks on journalists in the field or in their offices, and not because of the gradual coopting of the press by the government. Rather, US Department of State spokesman Richard Boucher's assertion that the US was closely watching the situation in Russia was spurred by the dismissal from the Gazprom-Media board of American Boris Jordan - whose appointment to the board, and as NTV general director, nearly two years ago was never expected particularly to further the cause of freedom of the press.

Indeed, it appears that the very lack of expectations may have been the motivation for his ouster. As the government edged out previous media owner Vladimir Gusinsky in the Spring of 2001, Jordan replaced Yevgeni Kiselev at NTV, causing several journalists to quit in protest against what they saw as an attack on media freedom. If, as many assumed, Jordan originally was appointed because the government anticipated he would ensure the station's support of official activity, then NTV coverage of the October hostage drama in Moscow must have infuriated the powers-that-be. Given the timing of Jordan's ouster, no other explanation seems as likely.

The board's decision to dismiss Jordan came just four months after the two parties had signed a three-year contract, giving some weight to the notion that whatever caused the dismissal, it was not the reason given by Jordan's replacement on the Gazprom-Media board, Alexander Dybal. Dybal, who served as chairman of that board, cited differing "views on corporate management and business development strategy." (INTERFAX, 1250 GMT, 17 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0117, via World News Connection)

While remaining diplomatic, Jordan responded by pointing to the editorial and economic successes NTV could claim during his tenure. "When I headed NTV at the invitation of Gazprom, I decided I would stick to two main principles: independent editing policy and effectiveness of NTV as a business. ... When we started managing NTV, it was on the verge of financial bankruptcy. ... In the course of these two years we succeeded in turning NTV into a successful business," Jordan said at a news conference. (INTERFAX, 1338 GMT, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0121, via World News Connection) He refused to comment on speculation concerning possible political motivations behind his dismissal.

Such speculation, not surprisingly, was rampant in media and political circles. While many individuals ascribed Jordan's ouster to NTV's coverage of the hostage drama, others saw broader political machinations. Much of the analysis, however, seemed to owe more to widely held beliefs that Moscow does not encourage press freedom. Igor Yakovenko, secretary general of the Russian Union of Journalists, charged that the move was due to a government desire to tighten control of the media. His charges were echoed by Duma MP Boris Nemtsov, who claimed that such actions were meant to "[establish] total censorship, primarily in the electronic mass media," before parliamentary and presidential elections. Alexei Venediktov, editor-in-chief of Ekho Moskvyy, also saw a shadowy political hand behind the ouster. "It seems to me that this dismissal is politically motivated, and it has nothing to do with NTV's coverage of the events at Dubrovka. It's possible that there are some other factors as well, but I know nothing about them," Venediktov said. (INTERFAX, 1709 GMT, 17 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0117, via World News Connection)

Not all members of the media saw sinister dealings; however, their own motivations also might be suspect. Dmitri Biryukov, president and co-owner of the publishing house Sem Dnei, which is part of the Gazprom-Media holding, said he "disagree[d]" that Jordan's dismissal is politically motivated. It is

absolutely an economic decision, which is based on the Gazprom-Media board's calculations." (INTERFAX, 1709 GMT, 17 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0117, via World News Connection)

Shortly thereafter, Biryukov was appointed first deputy general of Gazprom-Media. (ITAR-TASS, 2051 GMT, 29 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0129, via World News Connection) As for NTV having an independent editorial policy, the future does not look rosy, although the press releases may continue to be: Jordan's replacement as general director is Nikolai Senkevich, previously deputy head of Gazprom's information policy department. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 23 Jan 03)

POLLS

Present cloudy, future murky

The results of recent polls indicate that, not surprisingly, it's no fun to be on the bottom tier of Russian society. While the Kremlin busies itself with international affairs, life for many ordinary persons seems increasingly hopeless.

In addition to the heating crisis afflicting numerous regions, discussed in the previous NIS Observed, many Russians are facing a healthcare crisis. According to a poll by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Research, 71 percent of respondents said it is impossible to obtain good medical care in the country. Whether this is a new situation was less clear: 42 percent noted a decrease in the quality of care, while 37 percent reported there had been no change. (INTERFAX, 1518 GMT, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0121, via World News Connection) Certainly, low standards of living are affecting more and more Russians. The Ministry of Education and Social Development recently reported that in the past few years, "mortality from unnatural causes linked to unfavourable social conditions has continued to rise." (ITAR-TASS, 1238 GMT, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0121, via World News Connection) The ministry noted an increase in deaths from alcohol poisoning (by 34 percent) as well as suicide and homicide (up 9 percent) in 2000-2002.

Another survey indicates that few perceive the level of hopelessness likely to be alleviated by political parties, whose activities are increasingly ignored by the general population. A poll by the Public Opinion Fund indicated that not many Russians maintain any interest in the activity of political parties - over 80 percent of respondents were unable to name any party action that caught their attention during the week. (ITAR-TASS, 1547 GMT, 24 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0124, via World News Connection)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Steve Kwast and Dan Rozelle

Moscow is flirting with nuclear disaster

On 15 January, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree that cut back the list of nuclear technologies and equipment banned for export. This move opened the floodgates for "rogue states" to purchase enormous amounts of dual-use technologies directly related to developing military nuclear capability. The atomic energy ministry points to the increased international demand for Russian high technology as a reason for the decree and claims the technologies in question have become irrelevant for the country's security. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 22 Jan 03)

Putin's policy flies directly in the face of the current world terrorism threat and the need for all states to tighten the flow of technologies helpful to terrorists. The development of nuclear weapons has been the goal of many terrorist organizations. This latest action makes it that much easier for them to get their hands on such capability. It is further proof that Moscow is willing to do almost anything to sell equipment and knowledge for cash. It also highlights the Russian economic crisis that is at the root of these policies.

Just one day before President Putin signed that decree, Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko announced that Moscow and Damascus had reached an accord under which Russia will assist in the construction of a nuclear-power plant and a nuclear-powered desalination plant in Syria. (FINANCIAL TIMES, 16 Jan 03; via Lexis-Nexis) That announcement engendered such international outrage at Russia's flagrant release of nuclear information that Moscow made hasty denials and pledged it would not help Syria build a nuclear reactor. According to Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, "We are not even thinking about selling a nuclear reactor to Syria." He went on to acknowledge that Syria is a base for terrorist activity, and that eventually the weapons that reach Hezbollah through Syria will end up with the Chechens. "We will not give any weapons that can be a possible danger to Israel, which can be used against Israel in an attack, only weapons for Syria's own defense," he added. (THE JERUSALEM POST, 20 Jan 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Despite Moscow's assurance that no nuclear reactor would be built with Russian assistance, two years of negotiations and coordination between the governments in science, technologies and the training of scientists leave open the fear that some damage already has been done. In this field, information alone can be as deadly as the weapon itself. (ITAR-TASS, 1422 GMT, 14 Jan 02; FBIS-SOV-2003-0114, via World News Connection)

It would be wise for the international community to monitor closely Moscow's proliferation of technologies and information surrounding nuclear capability. The money it brings home to Russia is minor compared to the damage it could cause if such information reaches terrorists.

Russian military activity is on the rise, but it's not helping reform

Military troops are on the move in Russia. From fighter aircraft flying more hours, to increased numbers of exercises, to the Navy floating ships in every sea, the Russian military is moving back to levels of activity not seen in years.

On 22 January, Admiral Vladimir Kuroedov, commander-in-chief of the Russian Navy, said that the 2003 defense budget makes it possible to activate combat training for practically all fleets. "First and foremost, this concerns the Pacific Fleet because it must conduct a full-fledged exercise this year." (KRASNAYA ZVEZDA, 18 Jan 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The same dynamic also is seen in the Air Force. The commander of the Air Force, Colonel-General Vladimir Mikhailov, said the annual flight hours of Russian pilots would increase by 68 percent. That amounts to 25 annual flight hours for fighter and long-range aviation crews, and about 30 annual hours for attack airplane crews. (ITAR-TASS, 1525 GMT, 15 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0115, via World News Connection)

However, Russia's military leadership is falling into an old habit pattern in the way this new money is being used. Russia has lost significant combat capability over the past years because of insufficient funds for training. Now that the money is starting to appear, military leaders have reverted to earlier operating patterns. Russian senior officers need to ask themselves if this is the best use of the money. If Putin's goal is to reform and modernize the Russian military, then this infusion of funds shouldn't be spent entirely on exercising and operating equipment from the Cold War. A larger proportion should be used to put in place new weapon systems and to exercise new capabilities.

The Russian Air Force is a perfect example. Last year the force modernized only 12 warplanes. This year the target is 20. (ITAR-TASS, 1132 GMT, 16 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0116, via World News Connection) Rather, most of the new money Putin is giving his Air Force is being spent on increasing the flying time of old jets. Those jets are aging systems that cannot meet Russia's national security needs of tomorrow.

The same is true with the Russian Navy. Increased funding is being overspent on operating a Cold War Navy using the same old methods. Instead, the money could be re-apportioned to give the Navy capabilities to fight current and future world threats. The chief of the Russian Navy Staff seems to understand. "The 21st century is the epoch of the world's oceans, and many countries are spearheading their policies toward a greater use of oceanic resources," said Admiral Viktor Kravchenko. "Those policies require much strength, and the US and NATO are quickly building up the striking power of their navies. They are now capable of delivering strikes at targets 250 kilometers inside continents, even though their ships and submarines may be cruising outside the 600-mile zone. In the wake of this situation, development of the Navy must become a priority for Russia in the coming few years." (ITAR-TASS, 1444 GMT, 18 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0118, via World News Connection)

Despite that farsightedness, however, it is clear that Russian generals and admirals are reverting to old habits in the way they are spending Putin's hard-earned cash for military reform, showcasing yet another aspect of the military that warrants careful examination. An internal review of Moscow's distribution of military funds is necessary if President Putin and Defense Minister Ivanov want reform anytime soon.

Russia's hollow military

It's no surprise to astute observers that the Russian military faces a number of growing problems. Equipment and weapons consist mostly of aging, low-technology pieces. The Army is fighting a sustained, bloody conflict in Chechnya while the Navy continues to deal with the embarrassing legacy of the Kursk disaster. And all the armed forces possess some form of nearly unmanageable stockpiles of chemical, nuclear or biological weapons. While any of these situations alone is cause for concern, the most significant (and, recently, most visible) are the living and working conditions of service members. Without a

sustained, focused effort to counter their present poor treatment, Russia faces a subtle implosion of its military and the loss of an effective fighting force. Three key indicators provide a measure of the harsh lives faced by those serving in Russia's armed forces that, when combined, may result in a breakdown in loyalty and discipline.

CRIME

The last edition of The NIS Observed noted that Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov declared in his State of the Armed Forces speech that, while there is still room for improvement, illegal activity has decreased. When one looks at the raw numbers available, it is clear that they have nowhere to go but down.

In statistics that would be shocking to any Western armed forces, Military Prosecutor-General Alexander Savekov said that his office exposed approximately 80,000 violations of law committed both by rank-and-file personnel and by military officials. This number includes criminal charges of hazing against more than 2,000 servicemen in the first 11 months of 2002 and 1,300 officers who were punished for maltreating their subordinates. Other equally astounding numbers are that 800 soldiers and officers were murdered by other servicemembers; 1,200 servicemen died from actions other than combat. In addition, military prosecutors have found and returned to depots 1,500 units of small arms, 300,000 rounds of ammunition and 1,200 kilograms of explosives over the past three years. (ITAR-TASS, 1402 GMT, 10 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0110, via World News Connection)

Despite these dire figures, Savekov asserted that the Army situation was better than that of the country in general with a crime rate 2 to 2.5 times below the national average. "The situation is under control, despite certain violations of the law," he said. (KOMMERSANT, 11 Jan 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

DRUG ABUSE

Feeding the crisis is the growing problem of drugs and drug addiction. Between 1995 and 2000, the number of conscription-age men declared unfit for service due to drug addiction quadrupled -- from 4,700 to 20,900. Despite the military's efforts to prevent drug users from serving, their numbers are steadily increasing. It is now estimated that one-fifth of the 400,000 men conscripted annually are drug addicts. (ROSSIYA, 14 Nov 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database) The example of the North Caucasus Military District serves to illustrate the drug problem: In 2000, 18% of conscripts from the district had used drugs; in 2001, the number had grown to 33%, and in 2002 it was nearly 40%. While the figures stated here certainly are not representative of all districts, the rise in drug usage is mirrored elsewhere.

With rising drug abuse rates come higher levels of crime. The FSB has charged that organized crime groups are using military personnel to transport illegal drugs, often with vehicles belonging to the security forces. The theft of narcotics from military clinics and storehouses also is becoming increasingly common. In one instance over 3,500 pills and about 600 syringes filled with a potent painkiller were stolen from a storehouse in Stavropol. Even the defense ministry is not immune: Students in the ministry's institutions are being implicated more frequently in drug dealing.

The danger posed by this situation to the country as a whole has not gone unnoticed. The deputy chairman of the Duma defense committee, Eduard Vorobiev, says the problem is serious "because the spread of drug addiction now poses a threat not only to public health and the economy, but to the nation's security and capacity to defend itself." (NEZAVISIMOE VOENNOE OBOZRENIE, 30 Oct 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Russian Political Monitor Database)

MASS DESERTIONS

The most visible problem faced by Russia's military over the course of the last several months has been desertion by large groups of soldiers. Individual desertions are frequent among Russia's 1.1 million members. Many are conscripts forced to serve two years in the Army (three in the Navy), often under brutal conditions and subject to severe bullying and violence by officers and other soldiers. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 5 Jan 02; via ISI Defense and Security Database) According to members of the human rights organization, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, 740 soldiers sought assistance after deserting in 2002. However, of late, larger-than-usual groups of soldiers have deserted. Some of the most publicized incidents:

On 18 October 2002, 18 soldiers deserted from an emergencies ministry military unit, saying officers of the unit beat them with iron rods. The soldiers went to the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers and detailed their ordeal, showing the bruises that reportedly resulted from the beatings. The Military Prosecutor's Office, while unable to explain the bruises, claimed that none of the soldiers was beaten; however, one claim by the committee that the soldiers were being used as a free labor force was acknowledged indirectly: "Yes, soldiers worked at enterprises (including private companies) and farms in order to get food for privates. If we had offended them, they would have written a complaint to Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu...." (TRIBUNA, 22 Oct 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Sixteen soldiers also approached the committee on 3 December after deserting. All belonged to the Taman Motorized Division of the Moscow Military District. In this case all of the soldiers voluntarily returned to their unit after their request was met to have their apparently excessively cruel commander removed. (WHAT THE PAPERS SAY, 10 Jan 03; via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Thirteen conscripts ran away from a unit in the Sverdlovsk region on 19 December. The causes in this case apparently were ethnic harassment and

physical abuse by other conscripts. The "escapees" were returned to their unit after a search but will not face charges since they were gone less than 48 hours. The Military Prosecutor's Office has since pressed charges against the abusive conscripts and claimed that unit commanders were disciplined. (PODROBNOSTI, 23 Dec 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Twenty-four soldiers of the Federal Railroads Service Force left their unit in the Leningrad region without permission on 4 January. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers says that it received over 70 complaints in 2002 from soldiers serving in this particular unit. (INTERFAX, 0716 GMT, 5 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0105, via World News Connection) Understandably, the desertion is being disputed. The soldiers say they were being beaten by the officers; however, military spokesman from the Railroad Forces claim the soldiers were injured and deserted after drinking heavily and resisting officers' attempts to control them. (EKHO MOSKVY, 1500 GMT, 5 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Individually, the desertions described above can be treated as isolated failures of mid-level leadership by Russia's military. But collectively, along with the rise in drug use and crime, they are the symptoms of a widespread and growing void of able, ethical and committed leadership -- the same leadership that will be expected to shepherd reform of Russia's military from a conscripted force focused on large-scale war to a contract (volunteer) force designed to fight small-scale conflicts and terrorism. Regardless of what form Russia's military eventually takes, there is but one key to a successful military: well-trained, disciplined and motivated servicemembers who believe that they and their families are, and will be, well treated. It appears that Russia's military leaders have their work cut out for them.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Nadeza Kinsky and Scott Fleeher

UKRAINE

East-West

In January, Ukraine continued to balance its ties to the West and to Russia. About 1,000 anti-Russian protesters greeted the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit in Kyiv on 28-29 January with calls for an official Russian apology for Ukrainian suffering under Soviet rule and the dismissal of the Russian ambassador to Ukraine, who has refused to issue such an apology. The ambassador's reasoning had been that Russians also suffered under Soviet rule, and that one must differentiate between the Soviet Union and Russia.

The summit itself, however, was an affirmation of Russian-Ukrainian ties. One major event was Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma's appointment as the new president of the CIS (proposed by Russian President Vladimir Putin). This appointment, first suggested by Putin in November, originally failed due to opposition by three member states. It is particularly controversial since Ukraine is not actually a member of the CIS -- the Verkhovna Rada never ratified the 1994 CIS Charter. While Ukraine has described itself as an associate member of the CIS throughout the last decade, Kuchma pointed out in December that no such status actually exists in the CIS; he failed to clarify what this means for Ukraine's status in the organization.

The Ukrainian opposition decried the appointment, alleging that Moscow is building its ties with Ukraine with an eye to the presidential election in 2004, and scouting for a potential pro-Russian candidate to support. Oleksandr Moroz called the appointment "prearranged"; Petro Symoneko commented that "This is nothing more than a political farce aimed at prolonging Kuchma's political life for a certain time." Yuriy Kostenko of Our Ukraine linked the appointment quite explicitly to Russian interests in Ukraine: "This election means only one thing:

President Putin has obtained additional political leverage to exert more influence on Ukraine." (FINANCIAL TIMES INFORMATION, 30 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

The CIS meeting and presidency were not the only causes for Ukrainian-Russian relations being in the news. Before the summit opened, Putin and Kuchma signed the border treaty between Ukraine and Russia, finishing a four-year process of delineating the 2,063-kilometer land boundary. Both parties stressed that this would not separate the states, but rather draw them closer together, proving that there were no clashes and misunderstandings in Russian and Ukrainian interests. Putin commented that the agreement is "a compromise solution that does not call into doubt the national interests of the two countries." (ITAR-TASS, 28 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis) The maritime border, namely the Sea of Azov, still remains disputed.

The final reason for President Putin's presence in the Ukrainian capital was the opening of the "Year of Russia" in Ukraine. This continues the "Year of Ukraine" initiative held in Russia last year. While presidential speeches hailed the mutual understanding and cooperation of the two countries, it has been noted that there is little substance to the celebration. Once again, oppositional newspapers and lawmakers have pointed to Russia's efforts to increase its presence in Ukraine in the run-up to the presidential election, and Moscow's desire for a pro-Russian president to take over from Kuchma in 2004. Putin certainly did his best to emphasize the need for Ukrainian-Russian friendship in his many speeches held across Kyiv during the last days of January. As he explained during a visit to Shevchenko National University, "Russia and Ukraine can achieve success only if they rely on each other. Sovereignty must not hamper our relations." (ITAR-TASS, 28 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

Immediately preceding Putin's visit, with its affirmations of Russian-Ukrainian relations, was the publication of a Ukraine-NATO Membership Action Plan

(MAP), outlining concrete goals to be achieved towards NATO membership. (Text is available at www.nato.int/docu/basic/b021122a.htm.) While the publication itself is another affirmation of Ukraine's desire to develop closer ties to the West, it has been widely criticized from within Ukraine for its vague wording. Moreover, the MAP is accompanied by a document, outlining the objectives for the coming year, which remains inaccessible to the general public and the media. This second document has been described as unclear and unrealistic. In addition, a poll undertaken in December shows a decline in Ukrainian public support and trust in NATO over the past year. The decline is not surprising, given negative press coverage during and after the NATO summit in Prague in November. The course towards NATO still seems to be rather tentative, though it is certainly not being abandoned.

BELARUS

Best friends again?

Russian President Putin not only has been visiting Ukraine recently. He attended the Russia-Belarus Union Supreme Council meeting in Minsk on 20 January together with Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The meeting began the new year with a public affirmation of friendship between the two leaders, in stark contrast to the clashes of the last year. As Lukashenka summed up quite neatly, "The main result of last year is that we managed to preserve the Union. We did not give up any ground." (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0121, via World News Connection)

Overshadowing all other topics discussed at the summit was the introduction of the Russian ruble as a single currency in the Union State as of 1 January 2005; both presidents demanded faster progress toward monetary union.

Belarus is planning to begin use of the Russian ruble along with the Belarusian ruble in non-cash transactions as early as 1 July 2003, while the Belarusian ruble will be pegged to the Russian ruble at the beginning of 2004. Although the meeting primarily reaffirmed agreements that were already known, the

atmosphere nevertheless has taken a distinct turn. Previously Belarus had urged on the process far more strongly; now President Putin is throwing his weight behind the achievement of monetary union, which would also entail some propping up of the Belarusian economy by Russia. Minsk, on the other hand, is showing more caution and voicing doubts. Belarus National Bank Chairman Pyotr Prakapovich stated on 23 January that the Belarusian rubles would not be destroyed when the Russian ruble is introduced but rather stored at the National Bank: "A wise manager never destroys anything, he keeps it in storage."
(RFE/RL POLAND, BELARUS, AND UKRAINE REPORT, 28 Jan 03)

Belarus would have to undergo quite drastic reform in order to align itself to the Russian ruble zone. So far it appears hesitant to step too far along that path, as there is still great unwillingness to sacrifice Belarusian sovereignty in the course of this project. Hence, the question of a central bank and single currency, the most volatile of the issues involved, remains unsolved. Given these limitations, perhaps relations between Minsk and Moscow are not as rosy as the beginning of this year seemed to indicate.

MOLDOVA

To leave (the Transdnestr), or not to leave? What was the question again?

It has taken less than a month for the faint, yet discernable, prospects for substantive progress in the Transdnestr settlement to lapse from cautiously optimistic, to business as usual. The newly (albeit repetitively) renewed OSCE agreement for the removal of Russian ammunition and troops from the disputed region already has fallen prey to a "web" of orders and counter-orders accompanied by more doubletalk than might be encountered during a United Nations Security Council meeting.

The 2003 spinning of the "web" began with Deputy Commander-in-Chief Lieutenant General Valery Yevnevich, who flatly dismissed the "rumors of withdrawal" of Russian troops from the Transdnestr as "groundless," less than a

week after 28 rail cars full of Russian equipment had departed the region for Russia. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 22 Jan 03) (Translation: "rumor" = fact)

A few weeks later the "web" expanded in both depth and intricacy through an announcement by Major General Boris Sergeev. On 21 January Sergeev, the commander of the operational group of Russian troops in the Transdnestr, denied that he had received instructions to "suspend the liquidation of the Russian military presence in the Dniestr region for six months." (BASAPRESS, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0122, via World News Connection) (Translation: "suspend the liquidation" = continue)

In a subsequent report, the Russian news agency reported that the head of the General Staff of the Russian Army, Anatoly Kvashnin, had "suspended an earlier decision to liquidate the Operation Group" (in the Transdnestr). Kvashnin further explained that "this new decision had been caused by a lack of a diplomatic solution on the withdrawal of Russian troops and munitions from the region." (BASAPRESS, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0122, via World News Connection) (Translation: "suspended" = disregarded; "lack of diplomatic solution" = OSCE agreement)

The source providing Kvashnin's comments went on to add that the commander of Russian troops in the Transdnestr had been informed "on time." (BASAPRESS, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0122, via World News Connection) (Translation: "on time" = not at all)

As might be expected, Sergeev responded that he "had not received orders in this regard, and that the duties of Russian troops in the Transdnestr region had not undergone any changes yet." (BASAPRESS, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0122, via World News Connection) (Translation: "I am not all that concerned about the OSCE agreement, or for that matter 'guidance' from Moscow. I kind of like it down here.")

Officials of the Transdniestr foreign ministry provided a final, but no less significant, layer to the "web" in their confirmation that an order from Moscow calling for "suspension of the decision to terminate Russian military presence in the region" did in fact exist. (BASAPRESS, 21 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0122, via World News Connection)

The precise role of the approximately 2,500 Russian "peacekeepers" stationed in the Transdniestr remains murky. However, Moscow's desire to maintain a military presence in the region remains crystal clear, regardless of commitments to the OSCE.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

Nord-Ost terrorists were in RF detention?

Yuri Shchekochikhin, a Duma deputy and deputy editor of Novaya gazeta, wrote in the 20 January issue that one of the female terrorists who took part in the 23 October 2002 Nord-Ost hostage-taking, had been held in Russian detention. Her mother recognized her on television and said that she could not understand how her daughter could have gone from a Russian camp to Dubrovka. (NOVAYA GAZETA, 20 Jan 03)

In a similar story, Ann Nivat reports that Movsar Baraev had been detained by the military intelligence, GRU, some months earlier and that other members of the terrorist unit were arrested in September: "Personal statements that I have collected make clear that, two months before the hostage-taking, the GRU... had announced Baraev's arrest. The implication is that he would have been held until his "release" to lead the hostage-taking at the Dubrovka theatre. At Assinovskii, a village close to the border with Ingushetia, which is where two of the unit's

women came from, their mothers say that they had been arrested and taken to an unknown destination at the end of September." (www.crimesofwar.org, 6 Jan 03)

Nivat is one of the most experienced Western journalists covering Chechnya. Her reporting is based on months of living in wartime Chechnya. She is also the Moscow-based correspondent for the *Le Nouvel Observateur* and author of the book, *Chienne de Guerre: A Woman Reporter Behind the Lines of War in Chechnya*.

Armitage in Moscow

In a 23 January interview with Ekho Moskvyy radio, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage made several comments pertaining to the Caucasus and Chechnya. He indicated that the State Department is considering placing three Chechen groups on its list of terrorist organizations. He declined to give further details, saying that this is a legally complicated matter and one in which the government has to be careful to weigh concerns about terrorism against the human rights of the Chechen population as a whole. (WWW.ECHO.MSK.RU) Indeed his reluctance to identify specific groups may stem from the fact that there do not seem to be stable formations that can be penalized without branding the entire Chechen resistance as "terrorist." In the aftermath of the Nord-Ost hostage-taking in Moscow, the Russian government has sought aggressively the extradition of Akhmad Zakaev, President Aslan Maskhadov 's representative in Europe. However, Moscow has not requested the extradition from Qatar of the radical ideologue, Movladi Udugov. It was Udugov who first identified the leader of the hostage-takers, Movsar Baraev, to the press by calling the Moscow office of the BBC. He did so at roughly 9 p.m. on 23 October, before any other specific information had appeared in the media. (ITAR-TASS, 2158 GMT, 23 October 02; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

Later in the interview, Secretary Armitage was asked about the US government's position regarding possible Russian strikes against Chechens in Georgia. Armitage is cited as responding that "a state that believes in preventive strikes would have difficulty criticizing the position you describe." However, he also indicated that the preferred policy for the US is to train Georgian units so that they may conduct counter-terrorism operations on their own. Unfortunately Armitage did not elaborate on US President George W. Bush's letter to President Eduard Shevardnadze, in which, according to the Georgian media, the US president responded positively to Georgian entreaties to include the US in the security dialogue currently underway between Moscow and Tbilisi. According to the Kavkasia Press news agency, the US president had sent a letter of encouragement to President Shevardnadze, which praised the accomplishments of the US effort to train and equip Georgian soldiers and complimented the Georgians on their policing of the Pankisi Gorge. (KAVKASIA-PRESS, 1319 GMT, 21 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) According to Civil Georgia, President Bush voiced support for free and fair elections and a peaceful transfer of power. (WWW.CIVIL.GE, 22 Jan 03)

UN Security Council Resolution on Abkhazia

On 30 January the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1462 authorizing the continued presence of the UN Observer Mission in Abkhazia, Georgia (UNOMIG) until 31 July. (WWW.UN.ORG) The function of the UNOMIG is to observe the Russian "peacekeeping" force in Abkhazia. However, Georgian officials presently are debating whether the mandate of the Russian peacekeepers will be renewed. The Security Council's action preempts the decision of the Georgian authorities and is highly inappropriate. The Georgian delegation was not even permitted to address the UN Security Council session. (RUSTAVI-2 TV, 1100 GMT, 31 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

On 29 January, at the CIS summit in Kyiv, President Shevardnadze had vetoed a motion to extend the mandate of the peacekeepers, and had indicated that

Georgia would agree to extend the mandate only if certain conditions were met. Shevardnadze said that he and President Putin had reached an agreement that the train traffic to Abkhazia would stop and that Georgian refugees would be allowed to return. (GEORGIAN TELEVISION, 0600 GMT, 29 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

On 26 January, the Georgian Security Council had passed a resolution specifying the conditions on which the Russian peacekeepers would be permitted to remain: If they expanded the zone of their activities to the Gali region; if the Russian authorities stopped issuing Russian passports to the Abkhaz; and if train traffic between Sochi and Sukhumi were halted. (KAVKASIA-PRESS, 1318 GMT, 26 Jan 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The Georgian position indicates that the mandate would be extended if Russia began to treat Georgia in an evenhanded manner. The UN resolution undermines this effort, which can only encourage Russia's hawks and make an armed conflict between Russia and Georgia more likely.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By David Montgomery

The Kyrgyz referendum: placating the opposition?

The leaders of Central Asia share a desire for controlling opposition and doing so with a semi-democratic pretext. Increasingly, the hold onto power is being manipulated in the guise of the language of "democracy," though the Central Asian use of the term retains an interpretive fluidity.

Turkmenistan has the reputation of having taken the most totalitarian approach to suppressing political opposition, but even President-for-life Saparmurat Niyazov has promised citizens that there will be presidential elections between 2008 and 2010. Of course Niyazov will oversee the elections and maintain a strong (if not

total) voice in the decision-making process as a member of the People's Council. (ITAR-TASS, 0550 GMT, 23 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0123, via World News Connection)

Uzbekistan started cracking down on the two viable opposition parties, Birlik and Erk, in the early 1990s. Both parties faced intense persecution and arbitrary arrests; eventually the leaders of the parties fled the country. In April 2002, however, President Islam Karimov announced himself open to the possibility of opposition parties that worked peacefully within the system. (EURASIANET, 27 Jan 03; via www.eurasianet.org) While these changes have been influenced largely by the close post-September 11 relationship with the US, widespread civic participation is not officially encouraged and Karimov retains a firm control over the country.

Kyrgyzstan, however, has long been praised for being the closest thing to a democracy in Central Asia. Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev was portrayed by Western media as a darling of democracy, and he has proved most adept at manipulating democracy in a way that is politically beneficial. If anything, the recent referendum shows a savvy and sophisticated way of dealing with political opposition - allowing citizens to vote for change before they understand the vote, thus increasing the persistence of the status quo over change.

THE KYRGYZ REFERENDUM FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

In the wake of the mid-March 2002 Aksy riots and the numerous protests that ensued, Akaev announced in August of 2002 the formation of a 40-member Constitutional Council charged with amending the constitution. The drafted amendments were to redistribute the division of power between the president and parliament and, according to Akaev, "the adoption of the new constitution will strengthen our leadership in the transformation to democracy." (EURASIANET, 18 Jan 03; via www.eurasianet.org)

Initially, the process of constitutional revision as conducted by the Constitutional Council was praised for its openness to oppositional views and its transparency. Some viewed the working draft as a work that embraced the process necessary for incorporating the concerns of the opposition; however, in late-January a special Akaev-appointed commission made modifications to the constitution that many members from the original Constitutional Council did not support. (EURASIANET, 30 Jan 03; via www.eurasianet.org)

While the original changes to the constitution involve more than 100 amendments, the referendum placed before the people on 2 February 2003 consisted of two "Yes" or "No" questions: 1) Should the law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On a new version of the constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic" be adopted?; and 2) Should Askar Akaev remain president of the Kyrgyz Republic until December 2005 [the constitutional end of his current term] in order to implement the approved constitutional amendments? (EURASIANET, 18 Jan 03; via www.eurasianet.org)

A survey conducted shortly before the referendum indicated that the amendments would be approved, although 64 percent of those questioned did not know what the amendments entailed. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 2 Feb 03) Even Cholpon Baekova, chairwoman of the Constitutional Court, expressed concern about the proposed amendments and argued that a minimum of six months was necessary for experts to review the amendments adequately. (EURASIANET, 18 Jan 03; via www.eurasianet.org)

The lack of awareness and general absence of public debate about the contents of the new constitution have caused concern among US and Western democracy organizations such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). At issue was the short period between the announcement of the referendum and the referendum itself - a mere two weeks. US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher

said that the early vote date would "not permit adequate time for public discussion of the government's draft constitutional amendments... [and] the draft also contains a number of provisions that fall short of international standards and would further concentrate power in the presidency and weaken the role of civil society." (REUTERS, 29 Jan 03; via www.reuters.com) In its official statement on the constitutional reform process, NDI commented that "recent developments have undermined a genuine constitutional reform process." (NDI, 23 Jan 03; via www.ndi.org) OSCE ODIHR expressed its concern "that such short notice between the announcement and the referendum appears inadequate" and urged that the referendum be postponed. (OSCE, 24 Jan 03; via www.osce.org) Furthermore, OSCE ODIHR declined to send election observers to monitor the referendum.

The timing of the vote has been a point of protest for the political opposition as well, who view it as an attempt by Akaev to circumvent meaningful change and to further his hold on power. Akaev responded by presenting himself as one who has yielded to the concerns of the opposition: "The radical opposition demanded my resignation... now that I myself have put a second question on the referendum, on whether the country's population has confidence in the president to the time his term expires, the opposition has again become unhappy." (INTERFAX, 1520 GMT, 27 Jan 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0127, via World News Connection)

The argument as continued by Akaev is that the new constitution, in replacing the bicameral parliament with a single chamber, would distribute power more equitably. Also, by putting his presidency to the vote, he can offer an effective retort to opposition calls for his resignation. But the short period before the vote left everyone with few choices. As Sergei Likhoman, a 45-year-old geologist, noted in voting on 2 February, "I see no other alternative besides Akaev." (AP, 0536 ET, 2 Feb 03; via www.eurasianet.org) That, in some ways, is the point of the inclusion of Akaev's name on the second referendum question. The president

is using a democratic procedure to strengthen his control of power before the public can effectively debate the constitutional amendments and before the opposition can formulate an alternative to his control of power.

Preliminary results from the Kyrgyz Central Electoral Commission claim an 86.3 percent voter turnout, with 75.5 percent supporting the new constitution and 78.8 percent supporting the Akaev presidency. (INTERFAX, 1422 GMT, 3 Feb 03; via www.interfax.com) Nonetheless, opposition leaders are contesting the results, claiming that less than the required 50+ percent of the population voted. (INTERFAX, 0801 GMT, 3 Feb 03; via www.interfax.com) Official results will be released on 5 February, but it is unlikely to shut up the opposition that has viewed the entire process as a democratic farce.

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