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CONTENTS / SOMMAIRE

- p 1-2 Summary notes
p 2-3 Résumés
p 3-35 Developping events
Revue de presse :
p 3-10 Azerbaijan
Azerbaïdjan
p 10-14 Armenia
Arménie
p 14-22 Georgia
Georgie
p 22 Daghestan
Daghestan
p 22-25 Abkhazia
Abkhazie
p 25 North Ossetia
Ossetie du Nord
p 25 South Ossetia
Ossetie du Sud
p 26-27 Chechnya
Tchéchénie
p 27-32 Nagorno Karabakh
Haut Karabagh
p 32 Ingushetia
Ingouchie
p 32 South Russia
Russie du sud
p 32-35 Javakhh
Djavakhh
p 35-36 Documents

SUMMARY NOTES

GEORGIA

Although the new opposition candidates denounced the January 4 presidential elections for fraud, and more particularly for voter participation that was too low to validate the poll, Georgia's Central Electoral Commission and the International Election Observation Mission noted a "clear improvement, in particular in the voting process, the new voter listings, the legal framework and general administration of the elections." Mikhail Saakashvili was thus elected president of Georgia by a record 96.27% of votes. An opposing party member refused to sign the final protocol, objecting that the voter lists were miscounted. Prior to the elections, Georgia had received offers of political and financial assistance (e.g., USA, Germany, etc.) securing the viability of the new regime. However, as of its first days in power, the new regime has had to face a large number of issues pertaining to serious problems both within its borders (e.g., displaced persons from Abkhazia, resignation of the chief of the militia, "Brothers of the Forests", David Shengelia, problems with the autonomous province of Adjara, which has carried out arrests and issued a state of emergency, etc.) and with its relations with neighbors (e.g., Chechen bases on the border with Russia). In a peaceful move, the council of Armenian nongovernmental organizations of Javakhh requested from Saakashvili autonomous self-

government for their area in Georgia's new structure. At the end of February, the preparations for the March 28 parliamentary elections were called off due to discord between Saakashvili and the Council of Europe on the minimum percentage for the proportional system (currently at 7%, which the CoE wishes to reduce to 5%), as well as on the composition of the Electoral Commissions that CoE wishes to balance in order to bring about parity between the authorities and the opposition. Finally, the authorities launched an unprecedented war on corruption; many key persons were arrested in various parts of the country, demonstrating a new will to create favorable economic conditions for investment in the country. A black mark was raised by international organizations that advocate for the principles of free press: several journalists and TV stations were repressed, leading to the suspension of programming and of "talk shows" and the closing of newspaper editorial offices.

AZERBAÏJAN

The amnesty granted by Azeri President Ilham Aliiev to 165 prisoners, 160 of whom were released at the beginning of January (including 65 political prisoners), was acknowledged by public opinion as a gesture of appeasement after massive arrests of opponents and the repression of demonstrators during presidential elections. Human rights organizations, however, affirmed that 180 detainees who were on the list of political prisoners recently submitted to the Council of Europe

had still not been released. To date, the government has issued pardons to 33 prisoners, and has released 3167 prisoners.

Armenian officers invited to take part in a NATO "Partnership for Peace" conference in Baku were not granted entry into Azerbaijan. They applied to Azerbaijani embassies in Tblissi and Istanbul, but to no avail; their various attempts to obtain visas went unanswered by the Azerbaijani authorities. In Baku, death threats made by Azerbaijani extremist organizations against the Armenian officers went unpunished by the authorities. During another NATO peace conference held in Budapest, Armenian officer Gurgen Markarian was decapitated by an Azeri soldier. Committed while the victim was sleeping, the crime was described by Hungarian police as "unheard of cruelty". It was to be followed by a similar crime against a second Armenian officer, which was prevented by the officer's colleague.

A Human Rights Watch report on the state of human rights in Azerbaijan following the presidential elections of October 14, 2003 noted a thousand arrests, of which 100 still remain in detention and could be condemned to 12 years of imprisonment. The report denounced the customary use of torture, electric shock and rape threats on the prisoners in Azerbaijan.

ARMENIA

Since February, after the stabilization of the state of affairs in Georgia where a revolution caused the departure of the former President Shevardnadze, several Armenian opposition parties created a new political dynamic by denouncing the legitimacy of president Kocharian and asking for his resignation. In the Karabagh peace process, newcomer Turkey said that it would like to play the part of mediator between Armenia and Azerbaïdjan. Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian rejected this idea "for as long as Turkey does not adopt an equitable attitude with regard to the two parties", referring to the partiality of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey conditions the lifting of its blockade of Armenia on

the resolution of the Karabagh conflict that is favorable to Azerbaijan, a country with which it has ethnic, historical and linguistic bonds. It also demands that the Armenian Diaspora cease efforts for the recognition of the genocide, which Turkey continues to deny. The subject was tackled in Tbilissi during Oskanian's meeting with Colin Powell; the United States, which has a strategic interest in the normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey, has tried for several years as co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group to assist in the mediation process.

RESUMES

GEORGIE

Bien que les candidats de la nouvelle opposition aient critiqué le déroulement des élections présidentielles du 4 janvier dénonçant les fraudes, et plus particulièrement le taux de participation insuffisante au regard du minimum nécessaire à la validation du scrutin, les conclusions de la Commission Electorale Centrale et de la Mission Internationale d'Observation des Elections ont fait état d'une « nette amélioration, en particulier dans la conduite des votes, les nouvelles listes des votants, le cadre légal et l'administration générale des élections ».

Mikhaïl Saakashvili a donc été élu président de la Géorgie avec un taux record de 96,27 % des voix. Un membre d'un parti adverse malchanceux a refusé de signer le protocole final objectant que les listes des votants étaient été mal comptés.

Dès avant la tenue des élections, la Géorgie avait reçu les offres d'assistance politique et financières (USA, Allemagne....) garantissant la viabilité du nouveau régime.

Or le nouveau pouvoir a eu dès les premiers jours à traiter avec un grand nombre de questions réunissant les graves problèmes à l'intérieur de ses frontières

(personnes déplacés internes d'Abkhazie, démission du chef de la milice « les Frères des Forêts », David Shengelia, problèmes avec la

province autonome Adjare qui a procédé à des arrestations et décrété l'état d'urgence) et ceux pourrissant ses relations avec ses voisins (problème des bases tchéchènes à la frontière avec la Russie). Plus pacifiques, le conseil des organisations non gouvernementales arméniennes du Javakhk ont fait appel à Saakashvili afin de demander un statut d'autonomie à leur région dans la nouvelle structuration de la Géorgie. Fin février, les préparatifs pour les élections parlementaires du 28 mars se sont terminés sur fond d'un désaccord entre Saakashvili et le Conseil de l'Europe sur le pourcentage minimum du système proportionnel (actuellement 7 % que le CoE demande de baisser à 5%), ainsi que sur l'amendement de la composition des Commissions Electorales que le CoE demande d'équilibrer afin d'assurer la parité entre les autorités et l'opposition.

Enfin, une les autorités ont déclenché une guerre sans précédent contre la corruption ; de nombreuses arrestations de personnalités ont eu lieu dans différentes parties du pays, montrant là une nouvelle volonté de créer des conditions économiques favorables aux investissements dans le pays.

Un point noir relevé par des organisations internationales de défense de la liberté de la presse : plusieurs journalistes et stations de TV ont subi des pressions qui ont conduit à la suspension d'émissions et de « talk shows » ou tout simplement à la fermeture de maisons d'éditions de journaux.

AZERBAÏDJAN

L'amnistie accordée par Ilham Aliev à 165 prisonniers, dont 160 ont été libérés début janvier (65 prisonniers politiques), a été saluée par l'opinion publique comme un geste d'apaisement après les arrestations massives des opposants et la répression des manifestants dans le cours des élections présidentielles. Les organisations des Droits de l'Homme ont cependant affirmé que 180 personnes détenues qui figuraient sur la liste des prisonniers politiques remise récemment au Conseil de l'Europe n'ont toujours

pas été libérées. A ce jour, le gouvernement a émis 33 décrets de pardon des prisonniers, et libéré 3167 détenus.

Les officiers arméniens invités à participer à la conférence de l'OTAN dans le cadre de « Partenariat pour la Paix » à Bakou, n'ont pas eu accès aux lieux de leur forum. Ils se sont rendus auprès des représentations de l'Azerbaïdjan à Tbilissi, puis à Istanbul, mais sans succès ; leurs différentes tentatives d'obtenir un visa sont restées sans réponse des autorités azerbaïdjanaises. A bakou, les menaces de mort à l'encontre des officiers arméniens proférées par les organisations extrémistes azerbaïdjanaises n'ont pas été sanctionnées par les autorités. Toujours dans le cadre des programmes de l'OTAN, un militaire azerbaïdjanais a décapité un officier arménien, Gurgen Markarian, venu à Budapest participer à une formation pour la paix. Le crime commis pendant le sommeil de la victime, « d'une cruauté inouïe » selon la police hongroise, devait être suivi de celui d'un deuxième officier arménien, empêché par le collègue de ce dernier.

Un rapport de Human Rights Watch sur la situation des droits de l'Homme en Azerbaïdjan après les élections présidentielles du 14 octobre 2003 fait état de mille arrestations, dont 100 restent encore en détention et pourraient être condamnés à 12 ans d'emprisonnement. Le rapport dénonce l'utilisation généralisée de la torture, de chocs électriques et de menaces de viol sur les prisonniers.

ARMENIE

Dès Février, après la stabilisation de la situation en Géorgie où une révolution des roses a provoqué le départ de l'ancien président Shevardnadze, plusieurs partis d'opposition arméniens ont mis en place une nouvelle dynamique dénonçant l'illégitimité du président Kotcharian et demandant sa démission.

Dans le processus de paix du Karabagh, un nouveau venu, la Turquie, voudrait jouer un rôle de médiateur entre l'Arménie et l'Azerbaïdjan. Le ministre arménien des affaires étrangères Vartan

Oskanyan a rejeté cette idée « tant que la Turquie n'adopte pas une attitude équitable face aux deux parties, faisant référence à la partialité de la politique étrangère turque. La Turquie conditionne la levée du blocus de l'Arménie par le règlement du conflit du Karabagh en faveur de l'Azerbaïdjan avec laquelle elle a des liens ethniques, historiques et linguistiques. Elle demande également que la Diaspora arménienne arrête son action pour la reconnaissance du génocide que la Turquie continue de nier. Le sujet a été abordé à Tbilissi lors de la rencontre d'Oskanian avec Colin Powell ; les Etats Unis, qui voit un intérêt stratégique dans la normalisation des relations entre l'Arménie et la Turquie, tente depuis plusieurs années d'y apporter sa contribution.

DEVELOPPING EVENTS / REVUE DE PRESSE

AZERBAIJAN / AZERBAIDJAN

01/03/04 - Azeri government to close down all refugees camps - 525 Qazet

headlined "All refugee camps to be closed down this year, according to a special project submitted to presidential administration". Following the president's instruction, the State Committee for Refugees has drawn up a special project for closing down all refugee camps, the chairman of the committee, Ali Hasanov, has told reporters. The project has already been submitted to the presidential administration. The president is expected to consider the project soon and take a relevant decision.

In addition, a new project is being drawn up to improve the living conditions of refugees living in hostels in Baku and Sumqayit. A special state programme has been prepared in this connection, according to Hasanov.

(...)

01/05/04 - Azerbaijan marks solidarity day - RFE/RL

Azerbaijan's parliament adopted a statement on 30 December pegged

to the Day of Solidarity of the World's Azerbaijanis, which in accordance with an edict issued in 1991 by then-Nakhichevan Supreme Council Chairman Heidar Aliyev is marked on 31 December, local media reported. The parliamentary statement called on all Azerbaijanis to work for a solution of the Karabakh conflict. A parallel address carried by AzerNews on 31 December and reposted by Groong summarizes the history of the various states that existed over the past 5,000 years on the territory of what is now the Azerbaijan Republic and claimed that "historic Azerbaijan encompassed the entire northern region of the Caucasus from the Caspian coastal area of Iran to the borders of Turkey, as well as the territory of present-day Armenia, the city of Derbent in Daghestan, and the eastern provinces of Georgia." The address estimated that the world Azerbaijani community numbers more than 40 million, including 8 million in the Azerbaijan Republic, 30 million in Iran, and 1 million in Turkey.

01/05/04 - Ilham Aliyev Signs First Pardoning Decree - RFE/RL

On 30 December Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev signed his first decree on pardoning or reducing the sentence of a total of 165 prisoners. Under the decree, 160 people were released from serving their remaining sentences, while the prison term of four convicts was reduced and one prisoner's life-term was replaced with 20 years imprisonment. Among the pardoned are former Interior Minister Iskander Hamidov, former head of the Interpol Bureau in Azerbaijan Ilgar Safikhanov, and former members of the now defunct OMON (special purpose police group) who mutinied against the government in March 1995. International organizations considered all these people political prisoners. Hamidov was arrested in 1995 on charges of abuse of power and misappropriation of state funds and first sentenced to 14 years imprisonment. But following a 13-month long retrial under pressure from the Council of Europe he was sentenced to 11 years in prison. In an interview with the media, Hamidov said that he will continue his political activities and pursue a

more radical policy. He expressed gratitude to President Ilham Aliyev. "I am ready to meet him and shake his hand," Hamidov said.

Local human rights activists have welcomed the pardon decree and expressed the hope that other political prisoners will be freed as well. Rena Sadaddinova, deputy chairwoman of the Foundation for Democratic Development and Human Rights, told RFE/RL that 65 pardoned persons, as well as four others whose prison terms were reduced, were on a list of political prisoners presented by Azerbaijani non-governmental organizations to the Council of Europe. Nevertheless, six persons whose names are on the list are still in prison. Sadaddinova noted that this was the new president's first pardon decree. She expressed the hope that the remaining political prisoners and those persons arrested in the wake of 15-16 October riots will be released under future such decrees.

In an interview with RFE/RL, Vurgun Eyyub, deputy chairman of the opposition Musavat party, hailed the recent pardon decree, but added that he would like the people charged with 15-16 October disorders to be released as well.

Also in an interview with RFE/RL, Mubariz Gurbanli, deputy executive secretary of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, pointed out that this decree demonstrates the authorities' impartiality to opposition representatives.

Leila Yunus, director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, noted that as expected, not all 245 political prisoners named in the list compiled by the Council of Europe have been released. She said that 180 more political prisoners are still in custody. To date the government has issued 33 pardon decrees, including the current one, and released 3,167 convicts.

01/06/04 – Another Azerbaijani journalist arrested - RFE/RL Newsline

Sadig Ismaylov, a journalist with the newspaper "Baki haber," was detained on the street in Baku on 30 December and charged with participation in the clashes between police and opposition supporters that followed the disputed 15 October presidential election, and with resisting the authorities, Turan reported on 5 January. A Baku

district court ruled on 31 December that Ismaylov should be remanded in pretrial custody for three months. Ismaylov's lawyer, Mubariz Garayev, lodged a formal appeal against that ruling on 5 January. Ismaylov denies the charges.

01/07/04 – Watchdog queries rationale for detention of Azerbaijani journalist - RFE/RL Newsline

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has written to the Azerbaijani Prosecutor-General's Office and the Interior Ministry questioning the rationale for authorizing that Sadig Ismaylov, a journalist with the opposition newspaper "Baki haber," be held for three months in pretrial detention, Turan reported on 6 January. Ismaylov was arrested on 30 December and charged with participation in the 15-16 October clashes in Baku, on which his editor in chief assigned him to report (...). RSF called for Ismaylov's release on bail, saying that it "sees no justification" for remanding him in custody at all, let alone for such a long period.

01/08/04 – Azeri opposition party against Armenians' involvement in NATO's Baku exercises- Turan news agency

The Azerbaijan Milli Istiqlal Party AMIP is against the involvement of the Armenian military in NATO exercises in Azerbaijan in September 2004 and regards it as "disrespect for the country's territorial integrity". AMIP is surprised at Baku's position on the issue, the party said in a statement. "AMIP has always backed Azerbaijan's integration into the North Atlantic alliance. However, the party has always voiced its protest against the Western countries' refusal to recognize Armenia as an aggressor which is not fulfilling UN Security Council resolutions on liberating the occupied territories of Azerbaijan," the statement says.

01/12/04 – Controversy over Armenian officers' visit to Baku continues - RFE/RL Newsline

Three Armenian Army officers will travel to Baku on 12 January as planned to participate in a conference to discuss preparations

for war games to be held in Azerbaijan later this year under the aegis of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, ITAR-TASS reported on 10 January quoting Armenian Defense Ministry spokesman Colonel Seyran Shahsuvarian. On 9 January, Shahsuvarian issued a statement accusing Azerbaijan of acting illegally by denying visas to the three officers. Those visa applications were submitted to the Azerbaijani Embassy in Tbilisi; Shahsuvarian said the three men will try to obtain visas on arrival at Baku's Bina Airport. Also on 9 January, members of the Organization for the Liberation of Karabakh issued a further statement in Baku protesting the anticipated presence of the Armenian contingent at the conference, Turan reported.

01/14/04 – Azerbaijani extremists threaten to kill the Armenians to arrive in Baku - Pan Armenian Network

The law-enforcement bodies of Azerbaijan do not do anything to prevent kamikazes that are organizing an attempt. The so-called "Organization of Karabakh Liberation" group has started to implement its criminal plans against the representatives of Armenia participating in the forum held in Baku by the North-Atlantic Alliance. We shall remind that on January 13 three officials from the Armenian Ministry of Defense were to arrive in Baku to participate in the primary conference on planning of "Cooperative Best Effort-2004" military maneuvers to be held in Azerbaijan within the frames of the "Partnership for Peace" program. According to available information, members of the "Organization of Karabakh Liberation" are preparing a terrorist act.

Though the "Organization of Karabakh Liberation" is not announcing its plans, one can easily understand what they mean by saying "most radical forms of protest". Organization's leader Akif Nagi tries to liberate him from any responsibility for the possible actions. Meanwhile, it is evident that he is the main organizer of the acts. "I would like to declare that I have never said anything about terrorism against Armenians. The journalists have invented it," he said recently in

an interview with "Regnum" news agency. At the same time, the interview reads: "I warn the Armenians that are going to come to Baku: they will meet unpleasant surprises. It will become a tragedy for them". Member of the Organization Firudin Mamedov promised that the Armenian soldiers will be taken hostages. At a picket near the British Embassy on December 14 Deputy Head of the Organization of Karabakh Liberation Barat Imani said: "We are ready to carry out terrorist acts against Armenians provided that the world considers Armenia and aggressor". Another member of the organization said that kamikazes that will kill the Armenian servicemen are ready. Akif Nagi himself has not denied the information: "We are not going to dismiss those who want to express their protest in a radical way," he said. The most interesting is that the law-enforcement bodies of Azerbaijan do not do anything to prevent the terrorists. The Echo newspaper writes: "Though the situation is rather serious [during the picket organized in the Baku airport when the Armenian delegation arrived] there were only few representatives of law enforcement bodies in the airport. Moreover, they were not trying to prevent the protest actions..." This is another proof that the official Baku is not able, or it doesn't want to guarantee the security of the participants of the conference. This makes us think, if NATO was right to hold such an important event in Azerbaijan.

01/16/04 – Azeri MP calls on officials to stop "irresponsible" statements against Armenia - Lider TV

Chairman of the Alliance for Azerbaijan Party MP Abutalib Samadov told Azerbaijani Lider TV on 16 January that Azerbaijani officials should not make irresponsible statements calling Armenians "enemies" or speaking out against the arrival of an Armenian military delegation to a NATO conference held Baku on 13-15 January. Speaking in a 15-minute studio interview with "After the Voice" programme, Samadov called on viewers to be less emotional and more realistic towards the settlement of the Karabakh conflict. "I have voiced

my displeasure at statements made by some officials. Speaking about Armenians, some high-ranking officials said that we should not forget that Armenians are our enemies. Of course, the Armenian side will skilfully exploit such a statement.

Given that we understand what Armenia has done to us, is there a need for a high-ranking official to say that they are our enemies?"

"Given that we say that you are our citizens, that we want to resolve the problem peacefully, that you will remain within Azerbaijan and your rights will be ensured, then our officials should not make statements saying that Armenians are our enemies and play into the hands of Armenia," Samadov said.

Following phone calls from viewers who accused him of being a "traitor", Samadov explained that "Armenians have always categorically said that they cannot agree to live within Azerbaijan." He went on to say that such statements would strengthen the stance of Armenians, who like telling the world that "they cannot live with us because we treat them as enemies".

"I think that the Armenian side has won this time again (referring to the failure of the Armenian delegation to arrive in Baku to attend the NATO conference). Armenians, who are usually unwilling to take part in NATO-related events, have done their best to attend this conference in Baku. They went to Tbilisi, then to Istanbul attempting to arrive here but failed to come. Unfortunately, our officials did not take a decisive stance in this regard. If ordinary people express their hatred towards somebody, this would not harm a common cause. State officials should be more responsible (in their statements). On the contrary, I wanted them to attend the conference." "Our poet Mammad Araz said that our era is an era of diplomacy. People speak about peace but carry bombs in their pockets. Unfortunately, Azerbaijan has not been able to accept this mentality, which is the current reality of the world. We have always spoken in an emotional way trying to prove that we are right but the deaf around us will never hear us. This is why, I am calling on you to be realistic in order to resolve the Karabakh issue," Abutalib Samadov said.

01/20/04 – Azerbaijani courts prolong detention of opposition activists - RFE/RL Newsline

A Baku district court ruled on 15 January that Musavat Party functionaries Ibrahim Ibrahimli and Sulhaddin Akper, People's Party Chairman Panakh Huseinov, and Umid Party Chairman Iqbal Agazade must remain in pretrial detention for a further three months, Turan reported. The four men were arrested for their participation in the clashes in Baku on 16 October to protest the perceived falsification of the outcome of the previous day's presidential election. On 17 January, a second Baku court similarly ruled that Rauf Arifoglu, the editor of the opposition newspaper "Yeni Musavat" who is also charged with participating in the clashes with police, must also remain in detention for a further three months. The first hearings in the case of 27 people accused of participating in the post-election clashes have been scheduled for 27 January, Turan reported on 19 January.

01/23/04 – Azerbaijan Accused Of Using Torture - Washington Post Foreign Service

Authorities in Azerbaijan have undertaken a campaign of political arrests and torture aimed at the remnants of the political opposition since the Oct. 15 presidential election, according to a Human Rights Watch report. The international monitoring group has documented nearly 1,000 arrests and widespread beatings since Ilham Aliyev succeeded his dying father, Heydar Aliyev, in an election condemned by Western observers as neither free nor fair.

Despite claiming victory with nearly 77 percent of the vote, the younger Aliyev has overseen a campaign to "crush the opposition," the group said, "with flagrant violations of international law." Nearly 130 political rivals remain in jail, facing sentences up to 12 years, according to the report, to be released Friday.

The post-election crackdown in the oil-rich country on the Caspian Sea has been in stark contrast to the events in neighboring Georgia, where similar allegations of vote-rigging in a November parliamentary election led to the

peaceful overthrow of President Eduard Shevardnadze.

The United States and other allies welcomed the "rose revolution" in Georgia but have generally refrained from forcefully condemning Aliyev in Azerbaijan, beyond suggesting an investigation into the violence that triggered the wave of arrests. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld visited Azerbaijan in December and congratulated Aliyev on his victory but declined to take questions about alleged violations.

"The counterbalancing institutions of power which exist in Georgia simply didn't exist in Azerbaijan, where all power is concentrated in the presidency," said Peter Bouckaert, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch who wrote the report based on more than 200 interviews in 14 cities. "In Azerbaijan today, there is a crisis of the very belief in democracy."

Other observers, including the Council of Europe in a recent report that detailed similar reports of beatings and torture, have corroborated the Human Rights Watch findings.

"Such blatant violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms are unacceptable in a member state of the Council of Europe," the council's report said. The council is slated to debate next week whether to sanction Azerbaijan. The crackdown began in earnest when a protest by the opposition turned violent in the capital, Baku, within hours after polls closed in the presidential election. Some protesters attacked police, who responded with force, according to Human Rights Watch, killing one man and sending 300 other people to the hospital. Soon, a nationwide crackdown against opposition leaders began, and top officials of the leading Equality Party and other anti-Aliyev groups were rounded up, along with hundreds of activists. Also arrested were more than 100 opposition election officials and observers who had refused to sign falsified election results, according to Human Rights Watch. Some of the alleged instances of torture took place in the Baku headquarters of a police group known as the Organized Crime Unit, Human Rights Watch said. Several opposition activists said they were taken there, beaten on the soles of their feet, threatened with rape and,

in one case, subjected to an electric shock machine supervised by the department's top official.

One of those beaten, Natic Jabiyev of the Azerbaijan Democrat Party, recounted in a telephone interview Thursday that he was held for five days and repeatedly beaten. At one point, he said, the head of the department beat him for about 45 minutes. "They hit me under the knees with automatic weapons and clubs," he said. "It's repression against the opposition," said Isa Gambar, the leader of the Equality Party, who in October placed second to Aliyev, with 14 percent of the vote. Gambar remains free, but his top four party lieutenants are still in custody. He said the crackdown had "seriously weakened" their ability to exist as an independent party.

01/23/04 - Azerbaijan proposes repeat trial of two political prisoners - RFE/RL Newsline

Prosecutor-General Zakir Garalov has appealed to the Appeals Court to reopen the cases of 11 former special police officers sentenced in November 1997 on charges of plotting a coup d'etat, Turan reported on 22 January. The Council of Europe has designated two of the 11 men -- special police commander Elchin Amiraslanov and Arif Kazimov -- political prisoners. They were initially sentenced to death, and that sentence was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment.

01/23/04 - As international criticism of Human rights abuses intensifies - RFE/RL Newsline

New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a 55-page report on 23 January detailing human rights abuses undertaken by the Azerbaijani authorities in the wake of the disputed 15 October presidential election, according to a HRW press release.

That crackdown encompassed the arrest of some 1,000 people, and more than 300 protesters were reportedly injured in clashes with police. The press release quoted Rachel Denber, acting executive director of HRW's Europe and Central Asia Division, as saying that "Azerbaijan is experiencing its

gravest human rights crisis of the past 10 years."

01/23/04 - And Azerbaijani police detain protesters - RFE/RL Newsline

Police in Baku detained on 23 January members of the opposition Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (DPA) who tried to stage an unauthorized protest outside the Prosecutor-General's Office, Turan reported. The demonstrators were demanding the immediate release of persons detained during the 15-16 October clashes in Baku between police and opposition, including DPA Secretary-General Sardar Djalaloglu. They also demanded that criminal charges be brought against those who falsified the election outcome.

01/28/04 - Situation with Karabakh conflict settlement has changed with Ilham Aliyev's coming into power : Armenia's FM - Arminfo News

The situation with the Karabakh conflict settlement has changed with Ilham Aliyev's coming into power, Armenia's Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanyan said in his Monday interview to Armenia's Public Television.

The issue was close to resolution when Haydar Aliyev was in power as he was ready to compromise. He was a realist and believed that he had a moral right to take serious steps in this direction and an ability to convince his people that those steps complied with their interests. This all was documented in the Key-West agreements. But later on Aliyev abandoned his position under the influence of his entourage including his son Ilham who believed that such actions might weaken their regime. That's why they - and Ilham in particular - opposed and continue opposing the agreements.

Ilham knows that unlike his father he has no moral right to set such tasks to his people and his opposition. Consequently the situation has changed. But Armenia still hopes for success.

As for the statement of his Azeri counterpart Vilayat Guliev that the Key-West and Paris agreements are "chimeras," Oskanyan said that if Haydar Aliyev did not show the documents to Guliev he is ready to

do that during their next meeting. "I can even give him a copy." The other question is whether these agreements are valid any longer. "Any agreement is valid as long as the parties are negotiating on it." Today Azerbaijan refuses to negotiate on these documents while Armenia considers them a serious basis for continuation of the talks and for settlement of the problem as a whole.

01/28/04 – The list of Azeri political prisoners is enlarged - Pan Armenian Network

International organizations demand that Baku release the illegally arrested oppositionists.

The "Human Rights Watch" organization dedicated to protecting of human rights published a report concerning the situation in Azerbaijan after the October 15 Presidential elections. In the document consisting of 55 pages the Azerbaijani authorities are being condemned of hundreds of arbitrary arrests, widespread beatings and torture, and politically motivated job dismissals of members and supporters of the opposition following the October 15 presidential election. The authors of the report are sure that Ilham Aliyev has won the elections as a result of falsifications.

According to the report, there are 1000 arrested: more than 100 detainees remain in custody, and could face imprisonment of up to 12 years. "Azerbaijan is experiencing its gravest human rights crisis of the past ten years," according to the organization. The report is based on hundreds of interviews with victims and eyewitnesses in 13 towns and cities in Azerbaijan.

The organization underlines especially the Azerbaijani police and security forces.

According to the France Press, the Western diplomats confirm the condemnations of the "Human Rights Watch". One of them, preferring to remain unknown, told the reporter: "People said they were being tortured through severe beatings, electric shocks, and threats of male rape". The Human Rights Watch condemned the governments of Western countries, especially the USA, for inaction. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of State made a statement about the situation in Azerbaijan last week.

The official Washington urged the Azerbaijani government to speed up the investigation of cases of people arrested on October 15.

"The Azerbaijani authorities have to prove the guilt of detainees or immediately release them," Official Representative of the Department of State Adam Erely said. Speaking at the OSCE session in Vienna, U.S. Permanent Representative of USA to OSCE Douglas Davidson also spoke about the illegal arrests in Azerbaijan. He reminded that more than there are still more than 100 detainees. Members of the special mission presented to the President Aliyev the position of OSCE to the events. "It was an oral confidential demarche," a well-informed diplomatic source told Touran agency.

The leaders of the organization applied to the President of France Jacques Chirak asking him to speak about the release of the editor of "Yeni Musavat" newspaper during the official visit of Ilham Aliyev to France. The editor Rauf Arifoglu was arrested on October 27, 2003.

Commenting the reaction of international organizations, the head of the cabinet of Azerbaijani President told the journalists that their opinion "is not of an obligatory nature" but only a recommendation. Deputy Prosecutor General of the country Eldar Nuriyev said that the statements of international structures can not affect the investigation. It is known that the deputy head of the police department of Baku, General Yashar Aliyev has personally participated in beating of journalists. The journalists were demanding to punish him, but the prosecutor's office has refused even to consider the issue. The video records possessed by the investigating bodies show that during the events of October 16 the policemen were beating even those who were not able to resist. According to the "Echo" newspaper [Baku], "It wouldn't be difficult to reveal those policemen and call them to account..."

01/29/04 – Azeri MP criticizes opposition, government stance on Council of Europe session - Sarq

Text of Teymur report by Azerbaijani newspaper Sarq on 29 January headlined "To be happy

about the pressure on Azerbaijan runs counter to our statehood", subheaded "The opposition media are analysing the developments in the Council of Europe in a way like it is Armenian". The fact that Azerbaijan has undertaken certain commitments to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [PACE] during the organization's winter session is a focus of attention in the country. For this reason, the forces interested in this in Azerbaijan want to reap the benefit of the PACE discussions in line with their interests. The chairman of the Civic Solidarity Party, Sabir Rustamxanli, approached the issue from another viewpoint. "The Council of Europe is an organization which has always been watching the developments in a certain country before and after its admission to the organization. For this reason, this is natural that some opinions and critical remarks are made about Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's path was not so long before its admission to the Council of Europe. The state, which has been independent just for 10-12 years, can have problems, because it came under pressure from the Soviet empire and Armenian separatism. But it does not mean that Azerbaijan has completely fulfilled its commitments to the Council of Europe."

Moreover, Rustamxanli expressed his sharp protest against the attitude in Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe discussions. He said that the government and the opposition wanted to reap the benefit of the situation in their own favour.

"The opposition media are analysing the developments in the Council of Europe as if it were Armenian. To be happy about the pressure on Azerbaijan runs counter to our statehood and other aspects. But the authorities introduce these developments as if nothing happened. The government has taken the path of showing that the pressure is empty and pointless. The position of the two sides is wrong and maximalist. I think the main thing for us is our people's interests and their achievement of development in the administration sphere, and all other spheres."

Rustamxanli said that Azerbaijan should be interested not in the stance of a certain international organization, but in the solution of its own problems and development.

01/30/04 – Azerbaijani authorities target religious community - RFE/RL

On 15 January, the Azerbaijani body responsible for historic buildings issued a written demand that the parishioners of the Djuma Mosque in Baku's Old Town vacate the building by 30 January on the grounds that the authorization issued 10 years ago to use the building for religious purposes was illegal.

But observers believe that the authorities' primary target is that mosque's popular young imam, Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, who was arrested on 1 December for his alleged role in the clashes in Baku between police and opposition supporters in the wake of the 15 October presidential election.

Ibrahimoglu is not a member of the Muslim clergy subordinate to the "official" Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Caucasus. He swiftly acquired a devoted following among young and educated Azerbaijani Muslims for his Friday sermons criticizing the "Aliyev regime," according to zerkalo.az on 6 December.

The news website characterized him as a talented, charismatic, and witty orator who speaks simply and straightforwardly. The website stressed that his followers are by no means "religious fanatics," but "intelligent people who have studied the philosophy and history of both eastern and western countries and who are fluent in several foreign languages."

In addition to his religious activity, Ibrahimoglu also worked on behalf of the Center for the Defense of Religious Freedom and served as general secretary of the Azerbaijani chapter of the International Association of Religious Freedoms.

Immediately following his arrest, Ibrahimoglu was remanded in pretrial custody for three months, despite evidence that he played no role in the 16 October clashes. (On that day he was engaged in "monitoring the postelection situation" together with Azerbaijan and international human-rights experts, according to Turan on 18 December.) Within days, a committee was formed to defend Ibrahimoglu's rights; its members were immediately summoned by police for questioning. Meanwhile, several international human-rights

organizations expressed concern at Ibrahimoglu's detention. But Rafik Aliyev, chairman of Azerbaijan's State Committee for Relations with Religious Organizations, told Turan on 5 December that Ibrahimoglu was arrested for his "political activities." "One cannot be a religious leader and a politician at the same time," Aliyev reportedly said.

On 23 January, Turan reported that U.S. and Norwegian diplomats and a Council of Europe representative visited the Djuma Mosque and concluded that its clergy and worshippers were not engaged in any illegal activities.

02/02/04 – Azerbaijanis say pretrial testimony given under torture - RFE/RL Newsline

The trial began on 30 January at Azerbaijan's Court for Serious Crimes of seven people charged in connection with the 15-16 October clashes in Baku between police and opposition supporters protesting the falsification of the outcome of the 15 October presidential election, Turan and zerkalo.az reported on 30 and 31 January, respectively. The seven defendants, who are charged with participating in mass disorders and resisting authority, unanimously retracted their pretrial testimony, which they claim was extracted from them under torture. They also demanded that a television crew from the quasi-independent television station ANS-TV be required to leave the courtroom because of that station's coverage of the clashes in question. The court is simultaneously hearing the cases of three groups of defendants, 24 people in all.

02/03/04 – PACE Demands that Azerbaijani Authorities Adhere to Democratic Norms, Release Political Prisoners - RFE/RL

The progress Azerbaijan has made towards honoring its obligations and commitments is far from satisfactory, according to resolutions adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 27 January. The resolution on "Functioning of Democratic Institutions" says that "the Assembly recognizes that Azerbaijan has achieved certain progress towards honoring

obligations and commitments since the last monitoring report in September 2002. However, it considers that this progress is far from satisfactory, particularly with regard to implementation of new laws."

Regarding the 15 October presidential elections, the Council of Europe has found that "the first election since accession of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe again failed to meet generally accepted international standards in several aspects. The wave of arbitrary arrests of opposition supporters and election officials and observers, as well as politically motivated dismissals that were reported in the post election period seem to continue." Considering all this, the Assembly urges the Azeri authorities to establish an inquiry commission with the assistance of Council of Europe to investigate the alleged election shortcomings and human rights violations that took place during and after the elections.

The resolution on "Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan" formally calls on the Azerbaijani government to release immediately political prisoners whose state of health is critical, and to speedily bring to trial those arrested since the post-election events. The Assembly decided to continue the current monitoring procedure until Baku makes essential progress on the outstanding issues, notably in holding free and fair elections, and fulfils its commitments regarding a peaceful settlement of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the Assembly warned that it might repeal the credentials of the Azeri delegation to the Council of Europe, if no progress is observed by June 2004. Meantime, according to local opposition parties, by giving additional time, the Council of Europe has dealt leniently with the Azeri authorities. In an interview with RFE/RL, Musavat party Chairman Isa Gambar pointed out that the adopted resolutions exactly and impartially describe the current situation. But providing additional time is not sufficient for the Azeri leadership to draw appropriate conclusions.

(...)

02/03/04 - Lawyers Are Dissatisfied With The Course Of Trial - RFE/RL

A group of seven persons appeared before the court on 30 January on charges of involvement in the 15-16 October mass riots in the capital Baku and of using violence against police officers. If convicted, these persons will be punished by imprisonment from four to seven years. The lawyers of defendants claim that the trial is not proceeding impartially and fairly. According to them, the court mainly prefers to interrogate those victims who will testify in favor of the authorities. During the trial, lawyer Mirismail Hadi petitioned for all victims to be required to testify before the court. He claimed the only victims of the disorders to testify are police officers. Their testimonies might produce the impression that only the participants of the protest are guilty of the clashes. But there are also victims who accuse the police and persons in black clothes of excessive violence. And by listening to their testimonies the court would get an unbiased and clear idea of the events. His petition was denied. The lawyers also agree with the Human Rights Watch conclusion that detainees arrested on suspicion of post-election violence are subjected to physical abuse and torture. (...)

02/03/04 - Azerbaijan outlines measures to protect journalists - RFE/RL Newsline

The Azerbaijani Interior Ministry and the independent Press Council established last year (...) have drafted measures to minimize the likelihood that journalists covering political demonstrations will be targeted by police in the event that a demonstration turns violent, Turan reported on 2 February. Press Council Chairman Aflatun Amashev explained that 500 special jackets will be manufactured at a cost of 20 million manats (\$4,091) and distributed to editorial offices. It is unclear how the jackets will serve to protect journalists. Special access to the site of demonstrations will also be provided for journalists, and a group comprising Interior Ministry and Press Council representatives will monitor demonstrations and take immediate action if journalists

are endangered. In the event of police violence against journalists, the monitoring group will insist on an investigation.

02/09/04 - Azerbaijan may not completely implement PACE commitments by winter session - RFE/RL

While the Council of Europe has set a deadline for Baku to meet its commitments, the Azeri authorities say that they will fulfill these commitments only on the basis of reality. According to Samed Seidov, head of the Azerbaijani parliamentary delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Azerbaijan may not completely meet the undertaken obligations by the autumn, adding that Baku would immediately implement only those obligations that correspond to its national interests. At its winter session the PACE provided additional time for the Azerbaijani authorities to improve the situation with democratic institutions and political prisoners by September. The Assembly warned that it might repeal the mandate of the Azeri delegation if no progress is observed. The Ago Monitoring Group from the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, which visited Baku last week, also urged local authorities to expedite the fulfillment of obligations and commitments, alleging that Azerbaijan was very slow in implementing its commitments before the Council of Europe and even lagged behind neighboring Armenia. The group also expressed its concern about the delay in bringing to trial some persons detained in the wake of the post-election 15-16 October mass disorders.

The post-election situation in the country was also discussed during the Ago group's meetings with leading opposition parties and human rights activists. According to human rights defender Chingiz Ganizade, the Ago group is familiar with reports on the events that took place after the presidential vote and the aim of their recent visit to Baku was to specify the information concerning the item. Human rights activists presented to the Ago Group video materials, documents and new information about the events.

02/19/04 - Azerbaijani Kills Armenian at NATO's Peace program - Baku Today

An Armenian military officer who was attending a NATO Partnership for Peace program was killed on Thursday morning with a knife by an Azerbaijani participant, AP reported.

"We suspect Ramil Safarov of having committed murder with unusual cruelty," Budapest Police Maj. Valter Fulop told reporters, according to Associated Press report. "We say 'unusual cruelty' because beside a number of knife wounds on his chest, the victim's head was ractically severed from his body." "We detained the suspect, who did not put up any resistance," Fulop said. The suspect is Lt. Ramil Safarov of Azerbaijan and the victim is Lt. Gurgen Markarian of Armenia.

The officers were attending an English language course within the framework of the Partnership for Peace program, which is aimed at increasing cooperation between neutral and former Soviet bloc nations and NATO in peacekeeping and other areas. Police said a political motive for the murder was among the possibilities being considered and were also looking into how the suspect obtained the murder weapons. Relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia remain tense after Armenian forces, backed by Armenia, occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding territories, internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan in the early 1990s. The war killed 30,000 people and left about 1 million homeless.

02/24/04 - Opposition Activists Stop Hunger Strike - RFE/RL

All the people arrested in connection with the 15-16 October riots in capital Baku have stopped their hunger strike. On 9 February several dozen detainees went on hunger strike to protest the unfair investigation into the post-election mass disturbances. But later one group abandoned the protest. The opposition members noted in their statements regarding the end of the hunger strike that the action was stopped at request of opposition leaders, representatives of the intelligentsia, heads of human rights

organizations and family members, Turan news agency reported (...)

ARMENIA / ARMENIE

12/29/03 – Turkish court rules to acquit teacher - ArmenPress

A Turkish court ruled to acquit Mrs. Hulia Akpinar, a Turkish teacher arrested earlier this year after she questioned a Turkish Government's decision to teach Armenian Genocide denial at a May 30th government sponsored seminar on "teaching genocide denial" in the town of Elbaly in the Kilis region. Upon asking a question regarding the international recognition of the Genocide, Mrs. Julia Akpinar and five additional teachers were detained. Akpinar was later arrested and only allowed out on about \$1,000 bail pending judicial proceedings. She was removed from her teaching position. The court's verdict of not guilty said there was no crime in Mrs. Akpinar's question.

According to an April 14th decree by Turkish Education Minister Huseyin Celik, the Ministry "must include the subject of the claims of an alleged genocide as part of the history and social studies education." To that end, Minister Celik had called on all primary and secondary school teachers to participate in local conferences organized to "instruct that the claims of the Armenian Genocide are groundless." The decree also mandated that all high school students must participate in a centrally organized essay contest refuting the Armenian Genocide, with the best essay to be published in an Education Ministry Journal. (...)

12/30/03 – Embattled Armenian television station loses new tender bid - RFE/RL

The independent television station A1+, which was forced to cease broadcasting in the spring of 2002 after losing a tender for the frequency on which it broadcast, was passed over on 29 December in the fourth tender bid for a new frequency that it has submitted this year, Noyan Tapan and RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Armenia's National Committee on Television and Radio instead awarded the

frequency in question to a newly created television company reportedly linked to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutiun, a junior member of the ruling three-party coalition. No further frequencies will be available for tender for at least five years. But A1+ Director Mesrop Movsesian told the independent daily "Aravot" on 25 December that while he has no hope his station will be able to resume broadcasting as long as Robert Kocharian remains president of Armenia, "all presidents are temporary, and I am not in a hurry."

01/14/04 - Former Armenian special services officer convicted of plotting to assassinate defense minister - Associated Press Worldstream

A Yerevan court on Wednesday sentenced a former Armenian special services officer to six years in prison for preparing an assassination attempt against the country's defense minister.

Levon Abramian was arrested in September while allegedly trying to obtain components for a bomb. According to the prosecutor, Abramian and an accomplice were planning to carry out the attack on Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian on President Robert Kocharian's son's wedding day. (...)

01/15/04 – World bank official commends Armenia's economic growth - RFE/RL

Roger Robinson, a senior World Bank official based in Yerevan, praised Armenia's macroeconomic performance on 14 January, but cautioned that the government faces a "serious challenge" in combating widespread poverty, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Robinson noted that the 12-year poverty-reduction plan adopted by the government in August, which seeks to reduce the poverty rate to 19 percent by 2015, is a priority in the World Bank's new four-year "country-assistance strategy" (CAS), which is due to be approved in March. According to government statistics, the economy is projected to continue to expand, although more than one-half of the population lives below the official poverty line and unemployment remains high.

There have been some indications of increased job creation. Last year's record-high GDP-growth rate of 15 percent was attributed in large part to expansion in the construction sector stemming from a multimillion-dollar cash infusion from the Armenian diaspora. That investment is widely believed to have accounted for a full 6 percent of the country's GDP growth last year.

01/16/04 – Armenian government launches plan to aid orphans - RFE/RL

The Armenian government unveiled a new plan on 15 January to offer financial incentives to encourage local families to care for children from state-run orphanages, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. The plan, coming in the wake of recently imposed restrictions governing the adoption of Armenian children by foreign nationals, would provide a monthly allowance for such families, with the government paying at least 50,000 drams (\$90) per child for food costs alone. Deputy Social Affairs Minister Ashot Yesayan said the government is also seeking to forge new measures that would allow for eligible families to care for the orphans without any requirement to adopt them. The option of receiving financial incentives without any requirement for adoption raises fears of potential abuse, however, in cases where families might be tempted by the cash awards to take on more children than they are able or qualified to care for. The plan is said to enjoy the support of foreign donors. The Japanese government is already the single largest contributor, having pledged \$960,000 in assistance for the program.

01/16/04 – Mass media, alternative service laws passed in Armenia - Interfax

Armenian President Robert Kocharian has signed laws on the mass media and alternative service that were earlier approved by parliament.

The Law on Mass Media guarantees freedom of the press and regulates journalists' work and accreditation, as well as the liability of media groups. This was welcomed by most of Armenia's mass media

groups and journalists' organizations.

The Law on Alternative Service gives Armenian citizens the right to choose between military and alternative service, if military service violates their religious or moral principles.

In Armenia, mandatory military service lasts for 24 months, alternative military service for 36 months, and alternative civilian service for 42 months. The law will take effect on July 1, 2004.

Armenia passed these laws in line with the commitments it assumed when joining the Council of Europe in 2001.

01/21/04 - Armenian court quashes murder-conviction appeal - RFE/RL

Armenia's Appeals Court upheld on 20 January the 15-year prison sentence handed down two months ago to businessman Armen Sargsian on charges of masterminding the December 2002 contract murder of Public Television and Radio head Tigran Naghdalian, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Sargsian has consistently denied any connection with the killing, and several other suspects have retracted pretrial testimony incriminating him. Sargsian's brother Aram, a former prime minister who now heads the opposition Hanrapetutun party, told RFE/RL on 19 January that even though Armen Sargsian's innocence has been proven, the Appeals Court would refuse to overturn the verdict in the light of what Aram Sargsian termed "the political vendetta" being waged against the Sargsian family by the present Armenian leadership.

01/26/04 - Food aid to Armenian needy - UN-Armenia

January 26 the United Nations' World Food Program will resume the distribution of food to needy people of Armenia. Those who receive the food aid are ranked socially insecure under a certain mark in a coordinated scale between UN and Armenian social security ministry, and should also belong to the following criteria, them being families with three or more children, children having one or no parents, families with a disabled pensioner.

For the first time in its history the World Food Program included in the list of needy the families with disabled kids and refugee families. The stipulated aid food package for one person will comprise 25 kg of flour, 1 liter of natural oil and 2 kg of lentils (bobs). An estimated 27,154 Armenian families will receive the food aid within the program. The families were selected last November. The heads of the public affairs department of the labor and social affairs ministry Hasmik Khachaturian reported that those families that were added to the list of the needy after November 2003, can apply to the food distribution stations for getting the food aid.

01/26/04 - Yerevan court sentences five for spying for Azerbaijan - Agence France Presse

A Yerevan court Monday sentenced five Armenians to prison terms of up to 15 years for spying for Azerbaijan, the neighbouring Caucasian republic with which Armenia is locked in a bitter dispute over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nina Shilina, her husband Edgar Filkov, her husband's cousin Iveta Filkov, a member of their entourage Alexander Gasparian and a defence ministry official, Artur Oganessov, were convicted of handing military and economic information to Baku from 1993 until their arrest in 2002. Shilina received a 15-year sentence, her husband 13 years, Iveta Filkov and Gasparian 10 years, and Oganessov a year and a half.

Shilina was also found guilty of an attempted bomb attack against the Erebuni hotel in Yerevan in 1993.

The information handed to Baku included details about the ethnic enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh, administratively part of Azerbaijan but fought over in a bloody war between 1988 and 1994 and since then controlled by Armenian forces, the court heard.

In December an Armenian national was sentenced to 10 years in prison for spying for Turkey, a country with which Azerbaijan has close cultural affinities.

(...)

01/27/04 - Genocide is and will be on Armenia's agenda - AZG Armenian Daily

Powell, Oskanyan stress USA's role in Turkish-Armenian relations Official Yerevan will not exclude the issue of Armenian Genocide's international recognition from its agenda irrespective of developments in Turkish-Armenian relations and Ankara's lifting its blockade on Armenia.

'No progress in Turkish-Armenian relations will be registered at the cost of Armenian fundamental causes. The Genocide issue is and will remain on our agenda. It has its independent process, but we will continue working with Ankara to promote positive moves in bilateral relations',- stated Armenia foreign minister Vartan Oskanyan at his meeting with the US Secretary of State Colin Powell at Georgian capital Tbilisi.

Oskanyan who flew to Tbilisi for participating in the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected Georgian president Michael Saakashvili, had meeting with several foreign officials, among them Colin Powell. At the meeting the US Secretary of State and Armenia foreign minister stressed the importance of bilateral American-Armenian ties, referred to the situation in Iraq, discussed Karabakh conflict adjustment and, top on the conversation, the Turkish-Armenian relations. The two sides expressed their satisfaction over the attempted dialogue between Ankara and Yerevan, and USA's strive to bring the dialogue to a more practical level.

(...)

01/28/04 - Armenia welcomes prospect of inclusion in EU wider Europe program - RFE/RL

Armenian officials and opposition politicians welcomed on 27 January a decision made at an EU foreign ministers' meeting the previous day to reassess in late June the prospects for including the three South Caucasus states in the EU's Wider Europe program, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, who met on 27 January with EU envoy for the South Caucasus Heikki Talvitie, said in a statement that the move "imparts a new quality to Armenia-

EU relations." Vazgen Manukian, one of the leaders of the Ardarutiun opposition bloc, said the inclusion of the three South Caucasus states in the Wider Europe program would be "a very positive fact."

01/28/04 – Turkey willing to remove the word "Genocide" from history books - Armenia TV CJSC

Turkish Prime Minister Rejep Erdogan, during his meeting with the representatives of the Turkish community in the United States held at the Turkish House in New York, delivered a speech in which he stated that Turkey is willing to remove the word 'genocide' and other words of this kind from books on history and expects Armenia to do the same.

Speaking about the protest sounded by one of his compatriots that the issue of the Armenian genocide has been on the agenda of the parliaments of various countries too frequently recently, Erdogan stated that Turkey is determined to carry out not a defensive but an offensive policy. The Turkish Prime Minister also referred to the issue of opening the Armenian-Turkish borderline. Erdogan said it is possible that the borderline will be opened 'if Armenia responds to Turkey's act of friendship'.

01/28/04 – Armenian Prime Minister meets Kofi Annan, Rabbi Schneier - ArmenPress

Armenia's Prime Minister Andranik Margarian met with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and Rabbi Arthur Schneier on the sidelines of the Stockholm International Forum 2004, "Prevention of Genocide, Threats and Responsibility," which convened on Monday.

As suggested by Margarian on Monday, in his speech at the plenary session of the conference, Secretary General Annan conveyed he would urge the United Nations to designate 2005 as the "Year of Struggle Against Wars, Genocides, Deportations, and Violation of Human Rights," in commemoration of the 90th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide and the 60th Anniversary of Victory in World War II. A member of the official US delegation, Rabbi Schneier asked how he could assist in improving of Armenian-Turkish relations. The

Rabbi has consistently been an adamant supporter for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide. In his Monday speech, Margarian emphasized that though there are no positive signals from Turkey, Armenia nevertheless wished to, "see Turkey freed of the burden of the past, beyond the policy of nihilism, and a country aimed at integration with European structures."

Prime minister Margarian also met with deputy foreign minister of Italy Margerita Boniver to reconfirm Armenia's willingness to deepen its relations with European organizations. Today Armenian prime minister is to meet with Swedish prime minister Goran Persson and the EU Chief Commissioner of Foreign Policy Javier Solana.

01/30/04 – Russia "not planning" to revise debt deal with Armenia - RFE/RL

Arriving in Yerevan on 29 January for a two-day official visit, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Boris Aleshin rejected media reports that the purpose of his visit is to renegotiate the enterprises-for-debt deal sealed between the two countries in November 2002, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. He added, however, that Moscow hopes to "complement [the deal] so that the two sides find it comfortable to operate within the framework of that program."

Armenian officials note that Russia has not yet made good on its commitment to invest in modernizing the five enterprises that Armenia ceded in payment of its \$100 million debt.

02/04/04 - \$8 million will not make Azeri army 4 times stronger, Armenian Defense Minister says - Armenpress

Armenian defense minister Serzh Sarkisian swept aside apprehensions that under the Bush Administration's proposed fiscal year 2005 (FY05) budget, released earlier on Monday, Azerbaijan would get four times more military assistance than Armenia, breaking the military aid parity understanding between the Administration and Congress in 2002. In terms of Foreign Military Financing (FMF), the President's budget would send

\$8 million in assistance to Azerbaijan, \$12 million in assistance to Georgia and only \$2 million to Armenia. Armenian defense minister who was in Moscow for attending a reception at the Armenian embassy to mark the 12-th anniversary of Armenian armed forces, was quoted by RFE/RL as saying that there was a gentleman's agreement between Armenian defense ministry and US Department of Defense that the principle of aid parity should be maintained. "If the US has decided to give Azerbaijan four times more of military aid than to Armenia, we have to see yet in which sectors it is going to be used and only then to draw our conclusions. "But I do not think that the \$8 million would make Azeri army 4 times stronger," he said. The 2005 fiscal year includes a proposed \$62 million allocation in economic aid to Armenia, reflecting a \$13 million decrease from the FY 2004 aid bill approved by Congress. This aid figure for Armenia, however, is \$12.5 million higher than the Administration's FY04 request. Assistance levels to Azerbaijan remain at \$38 million.

02/04/04 – Armenian opposition groups realign- Mediamax, RFE/RL, Arminfo, Noyan Tapan

Elements of Armenia's main opposition groups, still calling for a re-run of presidential elections held a year ago, announced divergent tactics this week.

The more radical element of the opposition, the Party of the Republic (Hanrapetutun) of the former Prime Minister (1999-2000) Aram Sargsian said it would fully boycott the work of Parliament and try to "overthrow" President Robert Kocharian through acts of civil disobedience. The former ruling party (1990-98), the Armenian Pan-National Movement (HHSh), issued a statement of cooperation with Hanrapetutun in the effort "to get rid of the current illegal authorities." Most Hanrapetutun leaders used to make up the paramilitary wing of HHSh, before their 1998 split over Karabakh policy.

Other opposition groups, led by former presidential candidates Stepan Demirchian of the People's Party (HZhK) and Artashes Geghamian of the National Unity Party (AMK), took a more cautious

approach. They said they would continue to try to unseat the President, but in ways that would not cause major destabilization.

(...)

Opposition groups hold less than thirty seats in the 131-member National Assembly. The three party coalition of Republicans, Country of Law (Orinats Yerkir) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutiun) has a 71-seat majority. Coalition allies have expressed regret over the opposition boycott, but said that the move would not precipitate a political crisis.(...)

02/05/04 – European official praises Armenia's reform record RFE/RL

Italian Ambassador Pietro Ago, who will this year step down as the Council of Europe's (CE) monitor for Armenia and Azerbaijan, praised Armenia's progress this week and urged Azerbaijan to follow its example. Both countries joined the CE in January 2001, after Armenia's membership was repeatedly delayed due to Azerbaijan's shortcomings. The Italian diplomat also told Armenian leaders that Azerbaijan's new President Ilham Aliyev does not view the settlement of the Karabakh conflict with the same urgency his father did, and focuses more on domestic issues instead. Ago urged patience with Aliyev, Jr. and suggested that the conflict would probably be resolved within five years.

In comments made during the tour of two countries this week, Ago said that Armenia's government should be "congratulated for their good actions," such as the abolition of death penalty, introduction of alternative military service and liberal laws on mass media and human rights. But Ago also noted that Armenia's political parties remain sharply divided over a year after contested presidential and parliamentary elections. He expressed "surprise" over the opposition's boycott of the legislative process and said that continuing political reforms are important for the entire society and the opposition should take part in that process.

While in Azerbaijan, Ago upset Azerbaijani officials, when he said that Armenia's fulfillment of its CE obligations should serve as an

example to Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani regime continues to arrest its opponents, and while hundreds of political prisoners have been released under CE pressure, hundreds more remain in prisons. Azerbaijan succeeded, however, in repeatedly postponing Council of Europe deadlines for the release of all political prisoners.

One of Azerbaijan's human rights activists, Arzu Abdullayeva, alleged this week that Azerbaijani officials give bribes to members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which includes both Western and Eastern European members, to entice their support.

02/06/04 – Mediation offered between Armenian majority, opposition parliamentarians - RFE/RL

Mkrtich Minassian, a member of the 17-member People's Deputy parliament faction, offered at a 5 February press conference to mediate between the pro-government parliament majority and the opposition Artaturtun and National Unity Party (AMK) factions that on 3 February announced a boycott of future parliament proceedings, Noyan Tapan reported. Minassian defended the opposition's right to declare such a boycott, but at the same time stressed that opposition deputies have obligations to their voters. He also suggested that the majority should be more "flexible," and that all political forces should put domestic political stability above their own interests. Minassian rejected media speculation that members of his faction might be invited to join the three-party coalition government, commenting that "we don't need this feeding trough."

02/10/04 – Armenia sends peace-keepers to Kosovo - Armenpress

A platoon of Armenian troops will be dispatched to the former Yugoslav region of Kosovo on February 11 in the first-ever peace-keeping mission abroad. Armenian defense minister Serzh Sarkisian said today that peace-keepers are expected to be rotated every six months. The agreement on sending Armenian troops to Kosovo was signed last September during a visit to Armenia

by General Georgios Antonakopoulos, the chief of Greece's armed forces and was ratified by Armenian parliament on December 13, 2003. The platoon numbering some 30 servicemen serving on a contractual basis is part of a special Armenian peace-keeping battalion that has been trained and financed by Greece. It will be placed under the command of a Greek army battalion deployed in Kosovo.

02/18/04 – Armenian opposition plans to increase pressure on leadership - RFE/RL

The leaders of the Armenian opposition parties aligned in the Artaturtun bloc decided at a meeting on 17 February to intensify their campaign to demand the resignation of President Robert Kocharian, but declined to disclose any concrete plans, RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Also on 17 February, former Prime Minister Aram Sargsian, a leading Artaturtun member, demanded an official reaction to a "Nezavisimaya gazeta" report that Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian traveled to Moscow last week to request permission to use the Russian troops deployed in Armenia should force be needed to crack down on the Armenian opposition.

02/24/04 – Murder of Armenian officer in Budapest planned within month - Arminfo

The murder of an Armenian officer in Budapest was planned within a month.

According to the Armenian Public Television, Armenian Ambassador to NATO Vigen Chitechyan said referring to the data of the Hungarian Police.

According to the source, Ambassador categorically refuted the statement that the Armenian officer allegedly insulted the Azerbaijani officer. "It is out of question," Vigen Chitechyan said. He added that this version was refuted both in the written report of the Hungarian Police and in the publication of the local press. And witnesses also confirmed this. Moreover, the Armenian Ambassador said that Armenian officers tried to establish contact with their Azerbaijani colleagues from the very beginning of the

courses, however, their efforts were not welcomed by the Azerbaijani officers.

02/25/04 – Armenian deputy foreign flies to Geneva for fresh discussions on Karabagh - armenpress

Armenian deputy foreign affairs minister, Tatul Margarian, has left today Yerevan for Geneva to take part in discussions over Nagorno Karabagh conflict resolution, convened by the by the Geneva-based Security Policy Center. The press office of the Armenian foreign ministry said discussions are slated for February 26 and will be attended by the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk group, a Special Representative of the European Union for the South Caucasus, the personal envoy of the OSCE acting chairman, as well as by the deputy foreign minister of Azerbaijan. International experts, journalists and representatives of diplomatic missions, stationed in Geneva are also invited to take part in discussions. The ministry said no special meeting of the Minsk group cochairmen is planned.

02/27/04 – Azeri Deputy FM regrets the murder of Armenian officer, but falls short of condemning it - Armenpress

Azerbaijani deputy foreign minister Araz Azimov, who participated in fresh discussions over Nagorno Karabagh conflict regulation, convened by the Geneva-based Security Policy Center, regretted the murder of an Armenian officer, Gurgen Margarian in Budapest by an Azeri classmate, expressing his condolences to his family, but avoided condemning the brutal murder. The discussions were attended by Armenian deputy foreign minister Tatoul Margarian and the three co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk group from Russia, US and France, apart from the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, diplomats and experts. In response to a question why the co-chairs have failed to develop a concrete plan of actions to end the Armenian-Azeri opposition over Nagorno Karabagh, as is the case with Israel-Palestinian confrontation, the mediators said there is little hope that the sides would even listen to it.

In their speeches the Azeri deputy minister spoke about Khojalu events and his Armenian counterpart about Armenian pogroms in Sumgait. Azimov argued that the conflict may be solved given that Karabagh gives up the idea of independence, while Tatoul Margarian countered that the conflict would end if the right of Karabagh people to self-determination is observed.

GEORGIA / GEORGIE

01/05/04 – Georgia elects a President - RFE/RL Newsline

According to exit polls and unofficial estimates, National Movement Chairman Mikhail Saakashvili was elected Georgian president on 4 January with between 85-90 percent of the vote, Georgian and Russian media reported. Of Saakashvili's five rival candidates, former Imereti Governor Temur Shashiashvili polled just under 2 percent and the others less than 1 percent. Mdzleveli candidate Zurab Kelekhsashvili's 3 January request to pull out of the ballot reached the Central Election Commission (CEC) too late for his name to be removed from ballot papers, Caucasus Press reported. Acting President Nino Burdjanadze and Minister of State Zurab Zhvania, who together with Saakashvili launched the protests that resulted in the forced resignation of President Eduard Shevardnadze on 23 November, have congratulated Saakashvili on his victory and announced that their bloc will align with Saakashvili's to contest the upcoming repeat parliamentary elections. The OSCE has urged holding that ballot in April or May, and Saakashvili said on 4 January that Burdjanadze, who will now return to her earlier post as parliament speaker, will announce the date "in a few days," ITAR-TASS reported.

01/05/04 – Few violations reported during Georgian vote - RFE/RL Newsline

On 3 January, CEC Chairman Chiabershvili told a press conference in Tbilisi that lists of voters have been revised to remove the names of persons who are dead or no longer resident in a given district, and are now "100 percent

correct," Interfax reported. Chiabershvili said late on 4 January that the voting took place without major violations. But the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported that one polling station in the southern district of Marneuli closed early, leaving some voters outside unable to cast ballots. The same television station also quoted Gia Danelia, a spokesman for the opposition Labor Party that had called for a boycott of the election, as claiming that the vote in eastern Georgia was marred by large-scale falsification.

01/05/04 - Saakashvili Faces Struggle after Georgia Win - Asbarez online

Analysts say Saakashvili must act fast after his inauguration on January 25 or risk losing the huge support he won in the uprising that toppled Shevardnadze in November. "Saakashvili has so far done very well to destroy the former regime. Now we must see how he can construct a new state," Archil Gegeshidze of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies told Reuters. It won't be easy. He must also try to break a deadlock over Georgia's two breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and put them back under central control to boost tax revenues and exploit the tourist potential of Abkhazia's Black Sea beaches. He will also have a problem with the region of Adjara, which is run as a personal fiefdom by Aslan Abashidze. Turnout in the election there was small, observers said. Trying to balance a move towards the West with an attempt at improving relations with powerful neighbor Russia could also be difficult. Moscow has accused Georgia of not doing enough to root out Chechen rebels based in its border lands. "He has inherited a very difficult legacy, of course. Clearly he has been given a very strong 'carte blanche' from the people, but this will not be on offer indefinitely ... In October or November the people will be asking Saakashvili what he has done," Gegeshidze said. His victory had still to be formally confirmed on Monday. Election officials said with less than one percent of the vote counted, Saakashvili had won with 95 percent on a high turnout. Exit polls on Sunday had given him 85.8

percent and another poll released on Monday gave him 95.4 percent.

01/06/04 - Georgia ready to discuss with Russia new troops pullout dates - ITAR-TASS News Agency

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said he was ready to negotiate with Moscow over new dates of withdrawing Russian military bases from the territory of the republic.

"The withdrawal of bases from the Georgian territory is a serious issue for Russia," Saakashvili said in an interview with the French newspaper Le Monde published on Tuesday.

"Moscow which has bases in Georgia and Armenia, has legitimate security interests on its southern borders, and we are ready to discuss these issues," he said.

The president stressed that the parties can discuss new dates of withdrawal, but within reasonable limits.

Saakashvili stated that Georgia should be a country closed to terrorists. At the same time he said he "did not believe that al Qaeda militants were in the Pankisi Gorge near Chechnya."

"I don't believe in it, because after September 11, their sources of finance were busted and we maintain a reliable control on our borders, thanks to U.S. military support," the president said.

"Incidentally, I've always believed that humanitarian assistance to Chechnya was a normal practice. We feel no hostility toward Chechens, but Georgia should be a country closed to terrorists," Saakashvili emphasized.

01/06/04 - OSCE says Georgian ballot showed progress - RFE/RL Newsline

The conduct of the 4 January Georgian presidential election reflected "notable progress" and "political will" on the part of the country's leadership and constituted "a welcome contrast to the deeply flawed 2 November parliamentary elections," Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly President Bruce George said in Tbilisi on 5 January, according to an OSCE press release .Craig Jenness, who headed the International Election

Observation Mission, commented that "we noted clear improvements, particularly in the conduct of voting, new voters lists, the legal framework, and overall election administration." But at the same time, he added that "there were nevertheless clear concerns," including political imbalance in election administration in favor of the interim leadership and the continued lack of clear separation between party and state structures.

01/07/04 - Georgian opposition politician claims Presidential election turnout falsified - RFE/RL Newsline

Union of Traditionalists of Georgia Chairman Akaki Asatiani told a press conference in Tbilisi on 6 January that members of his party who unofficially monitored the 4 January presidential election have concluded that voter turnout was marginally less than the 50 percent required for the poll to be valid, Caucasus Press reported. The Central Election Commission estimated participation at 83 percent, and exit polls and NGOs placed that figure at 80-85 percent. Asatiani said he suspects local election officials deliberately overstated the number of ballots cast. A preliminary report on the voting released on 5 January by the International Election Observer Mission and posted on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) website (<http://www.osce.org/odihr>) did not, however, register major problems with vote count and tabulation, although some such irregularities were reported in Rustavi, Marneuli, and Bolnisi. Asatiani rejected as "a bad idea" Labor Party Chairman Shalva Natelashvili's proposal earlier the same day to create a "parallel parliament," Caucasus Press reported on 6 January. Natelashvili does not recognize the election as valid, and said he intends to challenge the outcome in an international court.

01/08/04 - Adjaria arrests activists, reimposes State of emergency - RFE/RL Newsline

Two members of the Georgian youth movement Kmara (Enough!) that backed the November 2003 campaign to force President Eduard

Shevardnadze's resignation were arrested late on 6 January in Batumi, Georgian media reported on 7 January. Adjar Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze told local television on 7 January that the arrests were required to "defend constitutional order," and that police confiscated "weapons, ammunition, and antigovernment leaflets" from the two detainees. In Tbilisi, Georgian Minister of State Zurab Zhvania condemned the arrests, according to rustavi2.com. The Adjar Supreme Council voted late on 7 January to reimpose the state of emergency first declared in the wake of Shevardnadze's forced resignation. The state of emergency was lifted on 3 January to enable voters in the autonomous republic to cast their ballots in the Georgian presidential election.

01/09/04 - Georgia schedules parliamentary elections- RFE/RL Newsline

Elections for the 150 parliamentary mandates to be distributed according to the proportional-representation system will take place on 28 March, acting President Nino Burdjanadze told journalists on 9 January, according to independent television company Rustavi-2. Burdjanadze said the new Georgian leadership initially planned to schedule the ballot for 7 March, but postponed it after consultations with various political forces. OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Bruce George had proposed April or May as the most appropriate time frame. Election-law expert Vakhtang Khmaladze pointed out at a press conference on 8 January that the Election Code does not provide for holding elections for the 150 seats distributed under the proportional system independently of the ballot for the 75 single-mandate constituencies, Caucasus Press reported. He called on Burdjanadze to ensure that the required changes are made to the Election Code. The Georgian Supreme Court on 25 November annulled the outcome of the 2 November parliamentary elections under the proportional-representation system, but declared valid the vote in the single-mandate constituencies.

01/09/04 - Georgian officials criticize Adjar crackdown - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian Deputy Interior Minister Giorgi Ugulava said on 8 January that the state of emergency imposed late the previous day in the Adjar Autonomous Republic violates the Georgian Constitution, as declaring a state of emergency anywhere in Georgia is the exclusive prerogative of the Georgian president, Interfax and RFE/RL's Georgian Service reported. Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze said in Tbilisi the same day that the detention in Batumi of two members of the opposition movement Kmara (Enough!) was illegal and groundless, ITAR-TASS reported. But Adjar Interior Minister Djemal Gogitidze denied the two men were arrested for their political activities, Caucasus Press reported. The two men have not been allowed to see their lawyers, and on 9 January one of them was remanded to three months' pretrial detention, according to Caucasus Press. On 8 January, opposition Labor Party Chairman Shalva Natelashvili accused President-elect Mikheil Saakashvili of seeking to provoke a bloodbath in Adjara, the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported.

01/09/04 - Georgia wants new regulations for movement of Russian troops - Kavkasia-Press news agency

The Georgian authorities intend to draw up clear-cut regulations for the movement of the Russian military in the country's territory. "I am surprised that no mechanism has been worked out so far in support of Georgia's interest in the issue of the movement of the Russian military on the country's territory," the acting president of Georgia, Nino Burjanadze, said at a news briefing today in commenting on the 8 January incident in which a group of Russian conscripts, who were being transported from Armenia to the 62nd base in Akhalkalaki southern Georgia, were detained.

Forty Russian servicemen, who were being deployed from Armenia to Akhalkalaki, were stopped by Georgian border guards on Thursday 8 January.

Later, the chief of staff of the Georgian State Border Guard Department, Col Korneli Salia, told journalists that the Georgian side had not been informed in advance about the reinforcements being sent to the Akhalkalaki base. Having checked the documents, the Georgian border guards confirmed that the personal documents of the servicemen were in order and that all of them had entry visas. However, Salia said, the Russian side could not produce documents permitting the Russian military vehicles to move in Georgian territory. Therefore, the Georgian side offered the Russians its own vehicle and drove them to the Akhalkalaki base.

Speaking at the news briefing, Nino Burjanadze acknowledged that the Russian side had expressed readiness to resolve the problem of lawful movement of Russian servicemen in Georgia. "We have had consultations with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov and Russian Federation Ambassador to Georgia Vladimir Chkhikvishvili on the issue and I would like to state that no-one should attempt to turn the incident into a confrontation. The problem will be resolved," Nino Burjanadze said.

01/12/04 - Georgian President-elect sends mixed signals over new parliament - RFE/RL Newsline

Mikheil Saakashvili told journalists in Tbilisi on 10 January that fears that the timing of 28 March parliamentary elections will not allow opposition parties enough time to launch effective campaigns, and consequently the new parliament will be monopolized by the bloc comprising his National Movement and the Burdjanadze-Democrats bloc, are unfounded, Caucasus Press reported. "It is very important that the opposition is in parliament, rather than on the street," Interfax quoted him as saying. Two days later, however, Saakashvili told journalists that "the opposition compromised itself when it refused to stand by the people during the 'Velvet Revolution,' and so it has no chances of representation in the new parliament," Caucasus Press reported. The National Democratic Party of Georgia and Industry Will

Save Georgia both issued statements on 9 January arguing that the parliamentary ballot should be scheduled for May.

01/12/04 - And endorses strong presidency - RFE/RL Newsline

Saakashvili told the Imedi television station on 9 January that he will not limit the presidential powers, ITAR-TASS reported. "The people of Georgia has entrusted me with the presidential powers. I think that the country must have a strong presidency, and I will not raise with parliament the question of limiting or reducing the presidential powers," Saakashvili was quoted as saying.

01/13/04 - Russia talks tough to Georgia in row over military bases - Interfax news agency

Moscow has warned Tbilisi that any provocations against Russian bases and nationals in Georgia could have far-reaching consequences. This was conveyed to Georgian Ambassador Zurab Abashidze after he was summoned to the Russian Foreign Ministry in connection with recent anti-Russian statements by Georgian Popular Front leader Nodar Natadze, according to a Foreign Ministry press release received by Interfax today.

"The Georgian authorities should understand that any provocations against Russian bases and nationals on the territory of Georgia would have far-reaching consequences," the press release said.

01/14/04 - U.S. pledges support for Russian withdrawal from Georgia - RFE/RL Newsline

U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Lynn Pascoe met in Tbilisi on 13 January with acting President Nino Burdjanadze, President-elect Mikheil Saakashvili, Minister of State Zurab Zhvania, and Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze, Caucasus Press reported. During his talks with Burdjanadze, Pascoe expressed support for Georgia's determination to reach agreement with Moscow on the swift closure of the two remaining Russian military bases in Georgia, adding that Washington will pay part of the costs involved (see "Russia" section above). He also said Tbilisi must

resolve its problems with the leadership of the Adjara Autonomous Republic on its own. Pascoe and Zhvania signed an agreement under which Washington will allocate \$3 million to pay the salaries of the Georgian service personnel currently participating in the U.S.-funded Train and Equip program. Baramidze told Caucasus Press that his ministry will also receive an unspecified sum in U.S. aid. The agency added without revealing its sources that the sum involved is \$11 million.

01/14/04 – Georgian displaced persons take regional governor hostage - RFE/RL Newsline

Some 60 Georgian displaced persons from Abkhazia broke into the office in Zugdidi of Mingrelia Governor Leri Chitanava on 13 January and held him hostage overnight to demand payment of their allowances for the past eight months, Caucasus Press reported. A further 400 displaced persons surrounded the building, while others blocked the rail line from Zugdidi to Tbilisi.

01/15/04 - Georgia approves 48 mln euros in German financial aid – Interfax

The Georgian parliament on Thursday ratified several intergovernmental agreements, envisaging financial aid from Germany of 48 million euros. Georgian Finance Minister Zurab Nogaideli said parliament had ratified a deal on reprogramming a loan that Germany allocated in 1998 of 32.5 million euros for the Vartsikhe hydro power station. Another 8.5 million euros will be allocated for the station. The rest of the aid will go to other urgent projects. For example, a 12 million euro loan will fund a program to help the country's power sector, including the import of electricity and natural gas in the winter period. An 8.7 million euro loan will be spent on the Alaverdi electricity transmission line from Armenia, and 3.3 million euros will go to creating an independent agency to service power sector debts. All the loans will be allocated by KfW for 40 years at 0.75% annually with a 10-year grace period.

01/15/04 - Georgia's New Prosecutor-General Pledges to Deal with Corrupt Officials (excerpt from report by Georgian news agency Kavkasia-press)

The Georgian parliament, with 151 votes for and one vote against, approved the appointment of Irakli Okruashvili to the post of the country's prosecutor-general. Okruashvili, who previously served as the Georgian president's representative [governor] in the Shida Kartli region, was nominated to parliament by Minister of State Zurab Zhvania.

Addressing parliament members before the vote, Okruashvili revealed his priority would be the fight against corrupt officials, and said trials of corrupt officials would be held in absentia, while illegally acquired property would be transferred to the state. Okruashvili noted that both former and current officials, if convicted of a crime, would be punished.

Speaking in parliament on behalf of Okruashvili's appointment, Armenian representative Van Baiburadian expressed hope that the prosecutor-general's office would employ attorneys to represent Georgia's large minority population. Georgia's minorities have never had legal representation in either the prosecutor-general's office or the interior ministry.

01/15/04 – Georgian parliament adopts new national flag - RFE/RL Newsline

The parliament also adopted a new national flag, which was previously used by President-elect Saakashvili's National Movement as a party banner, Civil Georgia reported. The new flag -- a white field with a centered red cross and four smaller crosses in the corners - replaces the dark red, black, and white flag that was adopted by the first independent Georgian republic in 1918 and which was restored after Georgia's regained its independence in 1991. Some deputies stormed out of the parliament chamber to protest the approval of the National Movement banner as the national flag.

01/16/04 – Central election commission releases final results from special Presidential ballot - RFE/RL Newsline

The Central Election Commission (CEC) released the final results on 15 January of the 4 January special presidential ballot, according to Civil Georgia and the Rustavi-2 website. With more than 1.9 million of the country's 2.2 million registered voters casting ballots, the official results show President-elect Saakashvili with 96.27 percent of the vote, followed by Temur Shashiashvili with 1.85 percent, Roin Liparteliani with 0.26 percent, and Zaza Sikharulidze with 0.24 percent. Opposition Labor Party CEC member Badri Niauri refused to sign the final protocol of tally, protesting that the voter lists had been improperly compiled.

01/20/04 – One assassination attempt in Georgia succeeds, another fails - RFE/RL Newsline

Senior Adjara Interior Ministry official Temur Inaishvili died after being shot by an unknown gunman in Batumi on 18 January, Caucasus Press reported the following day. The unofficial Tbilisi-based Our Adjara movement claimed on 19 January that Inaishvili was killed because he openly sympathized with the movement, which aims to force by constitutional means the resignation of the present Adjara leadership headed by Aslan Abashidze. Georgian President-elect Mikheil Saakashvili has asked Prosecutor-General Okruashvili to take under his personal control the investigation into Inaishvili's death, Caucasus Press reported on 20 January. In Tbilisi, parliament deputy (Industry Will Save Georgia) and former banker Kakha Gigulashvili was shot and seriously wounded late on 19 January, Caucasus Press reported the following day.

01/23/04 – Adjara makes further gestures to Georgian government - RFE/RL Newsline

Adjara Finance Minister Yasha Chavleishvili traveled to Tbilisi on 22 January for talks with his Georgian counterpart Zurab Nogaideli about outstanding and future taxes and customs dues

transfers to the central Georgian budget, Caucasus Press and the website of the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported. Chavleishvili said the Adjara Republic will make such payments in future, but no agreement was reached concerning outstanding payments of some 140 million laris (\$64.9 million). The Adjara government transferred the first tax payments in two years to the Tbilisi government earlier this month. Meanwhile, on 21 January the Batumi municipality started flying the new Georgian national flag at the orders of Mayor Giorgi Abashidze, the son of Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze, Georgian media reported.

01/26/04 – Georgian leadership urged to comply with human rights commitments - RFE/RL Newsline

In a 23 January press release, Amnesty International called on President Saakashvili "to put human rights at the heart of his policies." Amnesty International specifically urged "decisive steps" to prevent the further harassment of religious minorities; measures to prevent the use of torture or ill treatment by police, and an investigation of previous allegations of such abuses; respect for freedom of the media; and the abrogation of the impunity agreement signed in May 2003 with the United States, under which Georgia undertook not to surrender to the International Criminal Court any U.S. nationals accused of genocide or war crimes. Amnesty International noted the agreement "runs counter to Georgia's obligations under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as international law."

01/27/04 – EU to include Caucasus countries in 'EU's Neighborhood Policy' - Georgian Times

European Union Foreign Ministers held a monthly basis meeting in Brussels and agreed on the need for early action by the international community in support of Georgia. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States and a representative of the European Commission attend the meeting. After the meeting the Minister for

Foreign Affairs and President of the Council, Brian Cowen, declared that "the European Union closely observes the developing situation in Georgia and they are especially interested in Georgia's fight against corruption, the issues of economic reforms and strengthening the rule of law. Good progress in these areas will make it possible for the international community to increase support to Georgia". Brian Cowen also said that the meeting participants addressed the question of including in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy three South Caucasus countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and agreed that the Commission, in consultation with the High Representative, Javier Solana, should consider this question and come forward with a recommendation before the end of the Irish Presidency.

On January 14-15, Javier Solana visited Tbilisi and said 'we want EU-Georgian relationship to strengthen and deepen.' The EU also urges the Georgian authorities to continue their efforts in preparation for the March 28 parliamentary elections.

01/28/04 – Russian troops in Georgia undergo pressure - A1 Plus

Pressure on Russian troops deployed in Georgia aimed at ousting them from the country are running increasingly high as Russian and Georgian governments hold talks over the matter.

A Russian military unit deployed in Akhalkalaki found itself in a difficult situation.

Local military and police authorities following a secret order from Tbilisi took under their control those organisations and individuals making business with the unit, A-INFO reports quoting reliable sources.

01/29/04 – Tensions rise in Adjara - RFE/RL Newsline

Armed supporters of Adjara State Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze took to the streets of Batumi on 28 January and security at government buildings was intensified in anticipation of a Tbilisi-backed move by Abashidze's opponents to oust him, Georgian media reported. Abashidze pledged to do all in his power to preserve stability, Interfax

reported. In Tbilisi, Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze said he will not permit bloodshed in Adjara, the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported.

01/30/04 – Georgia unveils new anticorruption measures - RFE/RL Newsline

President Mikheil Saakashvili submitted to parliament on 27 January a package of bills on further measures to combat corruption, Georgian media reported. Prosecutor-General Irakli Okruashvili and National Security Council Secretary Vano Merabishvili told journalists on 29 January that the bills would allow for filing civil suits against officials suspected of bribery, requiring them to prove that their assets were acquired legally. The bills would also allow the government to confiscate any assets that could not be justified. In addition, prosecutors would be able to release, or mitigate the punishment for, officials under investigation who supply information or evidence of crimes that they or colleagues committed. According to Interfax on 29 January, the bills stipulate that detained officials may not adduce ill health as an excuse for not answering prosecutors' questions.

01/30/04 – As another official arrested - RFE/RL Newsline

Vakhtang Chakhnashvili, the deputy chairman of the Finance Ministry's Tax Department, was arrested in his office on 29 January in the presence of Prosecutor-General Okruashvili, Caucasus Press reported. Chakhnashvili is accused of embezzling some 500,000 laris (\$232,000) while serving as chairman of the Union of Major Taxpayers, but Okruashvili told journalists the actual amount in question could be as high as 5 million laris. Chakhnashvili termed his arrest a "misunderstanding," and has refused to answer questions.

02/02/04 – Georgian President denies plans to downgrade parliament - RFE/RL Newsline

President Saakashvili told journalists in Tbilisi on 1 February that discussions are under way of constitutional amendments that

would reintroduce the institution of a government headed by a prime minister in what he termed "the normal European practice of sharing power among the branches of power," Caucasus Press and Interfax reported. Saakashvili said the absence of a government "is tantamount to sabotage," and that he considers former parliament speaker Zurab Zhvania the optimal candidate for prime minister. He said the proposed amendments will not weaken the parliament, which "will be similar to or even stronger than parliaments in Western Europe." Zhvania told Caucasus Press on 2 February that there are no differences of opinion between himself and Saakashvili on the issue, and that they both advocate a strong president and a strong government.

02/03/04 – Zurab Zhvania to become premier - AZG Daily

Michael Saakashvili, new president of Georgia, said Sunday that after the post of premier is rehabilitated by Georgian law, it will be occupied by his team member Zurab Zhvania. He told media that 'at the current stage it is expedient to appoint Zhvania in this post'. Saakashvili said that this week the parliament will discuss applying reforms to state constitution for restoring the post of prime minister in the Georgian government. Georgian president noted that 'it is necessary to maximize the speed of new government formation process for solving numerous problems the country faces.'

02/03/04 – Georgian Presidential ally protests planned merger of ruling parties - RFE/RL Newsline

Koba Davitashvili told journalists in Tbilisi on 3 February that he has resigned as political secretary of President Saakashvili's National Movement to protest the formal merger, scheduled for 4 February, of the National Movement and the Burdjanadze-Democrats bloc, Georgian media reported. Davitashvili argued that only a National Movement assembly is empowered to decide on such a merger. Davitashvili reaffirmed his loyalty to Saakashvili, but expressed concern that the president has fallen under the influence of former parliament speaker Zurab Zhvania,

one of the two co-leaders of the Burdjanadze-Democrats bloc. Davitashvili accused Zhvania of acting contrary to Georgia's national interests.

02/03/04 – Two Adjar opposition movements merge - RFE/RL Newsline

Two opposition movements established in recent weeks in Tbilisi with the stated aim of forcing the resignation of Adjar State Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze by peaceful and constitutional pressure agreed at a meeting on 3 February to merge, Georgian media reported. The newly combined organization will be named Our Adjara after one of the two original organizations. Koba Khabazi, who headed the original Our Adjara, will now head the Batumi branch of the combined organization, while Georgian parliament deputy Eduard Surmanidze, leader of Democratic Adjara, will coordinate the new organization's activities in Tbilisi.

02/04/04 – Police round up "criminal gangs" in western Georgia - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian Interior Ministry forces under the personal supervision of Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze launched a special operation early on 4 February in the west Georgian town of Zugdidi, arresting 30 people and confiscating huge quantities of weaponry, Georgian media reported. Baramidze said the target of the operation was people engaged in criminal activities -- such as kidnapping and smuggling - under the pretext of conducting guerrilla operations in neighboring Abkhazia. Baramidze also accused the Russian peacekeeping force deployed since 1994 under the CIS aegis in the Abkhaz conflict zone of collaborating with both Georgian and Abkhaz criminals in the area, Caucasus Press reported. Tamaz Nadareishvili, former chairman of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz parliament in exile, who is rumored to have connections with the Georgian guerrilla organizations operating in Abkhazia, said he believes the operation is aimed against criminals, not guerrillas, and is therefore justified, Caucasus Press reported. The UN Security Council has repeatedly called on the Georgian leadership to neutralize

Georgian guerrillas operating in Abkhazia.

02/05/04 – Controversial Georgian Deputy Interior Minister resigns - RFE/RL Newsline

Petre Tsiskarishvili, whom President Mikheil Saakashvili named deputy interior minister on 2 February, stepped down from that post on 4 February following a verbal dispute with parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze, Caucasus Press and ITAR-TASS reported on 4 February. Tsiskarishvili accused Burdjanadze of acting at the instigation of her husband, former Deputy Prosecutor-General Badri Bitsadze, when she refused in December to confirm his appointment as deputy minister. Burdjanadze rejected that allegation, and demanded that the National Movement, of which Tsiskarishvili is a member, issue a formal condemnation. Interior Minister Baramidze said on 4 February that Tsiskarishvili's accusation against Burdjanadze was "incorrect" and that he did right to resign, Caucasus Press reported.

02/05/04 – Georgian national guard commander resigns - RFE/RL Newsline

President Saakashvili accepted on 4 February a letter of resignation submitted two days earlier by National Guard commander Major General Koba Kobaladze, Caucasus Press reported. No official explanation has been given for Kobaladze's decision, but Caucasus Press noted "unofficial reports" that he might be investigated in connection with reports of corruption within the National Guard.

02/06/04 – Georgian parliament debates constitutional amendments - RFE/RL Newsline

Meeting in emergency session on 5 February, parliament approved in the first reading by a vote of 160 to nine constitutional amendments proposed by President Mikheil Saakashvili, Georgian and Russian media reported. The amendments reinstate the post of prime minister and empower the parliament to vote no confidence in the government, which must resign if two such votes are passed within a three-month

period. The president in turn acquires the right to dissolve parliament if it fails to approve the draft budget, or in the event of a government crisis. Addressing deputies on 5 February, Saakashvili said the new model is based on those of Western Europe, especially France, according to Interfax. Saakashvili argued that "strong authority" is needed to extract Georgia from its present crisis, but denied that such authority is tantamount to dictatorship. Deputies from the Socialist, New Rightist, and Traditionalist factions condemned the proposed amendments, arguing that they pave the way for a dictatorship.

02/06/04 – Russia rejects Georgian criticism of peacekeeping force - RFE/RL Newsline

At the weekly meeting of Georgian and Abkhaz government representatives and officers of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia and the Russian peacekeepers deployed in the Abkhaz conflict zone, Russian peacekeeping commander Lieutenant General Aleksandr Yevteev formally protested the landing by helicopter in the conflict zone late on 3 February of Georgian Interior Ministry troops, ITAR-TASS reported. He pointed out that under an earlier agreement signed in Moscow, heavy weaponry is not permitted in the conflict zone. Yevteev said Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze's accusation that the Russian peacekeepers engage in smuggling is no more than attempt to discredit the peacekeeping force. Interfax on 5 February quoted U.S. Ambassador to Tbilisi Richard Miles as praising the "positive role" played by the Russian peacekeepers in the Abkhaz conflict zone.

02/12/04 – Georgian parliament approves new government structure - RFE/RL Newsline

Deputies voted in all three readings on 11 February to approve a bill on the revised structure and powers of the government proposed by Minister of State Zurab Zhvania, whom President Mikheil Saakashvili intends to name prime minister, Caucasus Press reported. The bill cuts the number of ministries from

18 to 15. It provides for reinstating the post of prime minister, who is appointed and dismissed by the president, and who has two deputies. The prime minister in turn proposes ministerial candidates, who must then be approved by the president; the president has the power to dismiss the defense, interior, and state-security ministers. Two of Zhvania's proposed ministerial candidates, Anna Akhalkatsi (infrastructure) and Mikheil Machavariani (agriculture), have declined those offers, Caucasus Press reported on 11 February.

02/12/04 – Georgian guerrilla formation disbands - RFE/RL Newsline

David Shengelia announced on 11 February the self-liquidation of the Forest Brothers guerrilla formation of which he was commander, Georgian media and ITAR-TASS reported. He handed over to police a large quantity of armaments, including two grenade launchers, 17 antitank missiles, one antiaircraft system, and several hundred automatic rifles, together with a large amount of ammunition. Shengelia said the new Georgian leadership does not need the guerrillas, and that he will move to Tbilisi for his personal safety as he "made too many enemies" in western Georgia. Georgian police announced last month the arrest of several men allegedly sent from Abkhazia to murder Shengelia. It is unclear whether the other guerrilla formation, the White Legion, similarly intends to disband.

02/12/04 – Georgian central election commission extends registration deadline - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgia's Central Election Commission on 11 February extended from 14 to 19 February the deadline for registration of blocs to contest the 28 March parliamentary elections, Caucasus Press reported. Last week, President Saakashvili's National Movement and Zhvania's Democrats, which had earlier announced their plans to merge and contest the ballot jointly, postponed that planned merger indefinitely.

02/12/04 – Press watchdog concerned over Georgian developments - RFE/RL Newsline

The Vienna-based International Press Institute wrote on 9 February to President Saakashvili to express concern at pressure and reprisals against several Georgian journalists since Saakashvili spearheaded the ouster of his predecessor Eduard Shevardnadze in late November. The letter, which is posted on the institute's website (<http://www.freemedia.at/Protests%202004/Georgia09.02.04.htm>), appeals to Saakashvili to investigate those incidents and to take steps to ensure that journalists can perform their duties without fear of harassment or violence. On 10 February, the Georgian parliament decided to create a special commission to investigate pressure on the media, which has led to the suspension by the independent Mze, Imedi, and Rustavi-2 television stations of popular talk shows, Caucasus Press and the Rustavi-2 website (<http://www.rustavi2.com>) reported.

02/18/04 – Georgian Premier outlines government program - RFE/RL Newsline

Addressing the parliament session on 17 February prior to his confirmation as prime minister, Zhvania listed as his cabinet's priorities in the next five years increasing public-sector wages and pensions, reducing the scale of corruption, and promoting Georgia's integration into European structures, Caucasus Press and Russian news agencies reported. He said the government will remain loyal to democratic principles, will protect Georgia's cultural heritage, work to restore the country's territorial integrity, and increase its defense potential, according to ITAR-TASS.

02/19/04 – Russia, Georgia to launch joint border patrols - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian State Border Protection Service Director Chkheidze has told the independent Georgian television station Rustavi-2 that under an agreement signed in Moscow on 17 February between his agency and Russia's Federal Border Protection

Service, Russian and Georgian border guards will jointly patrol Georgia's borders with Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Daghestan beginning in the spring, Caucasus Press reported on 18 February. Chkheidze said such patrols will reduce the grounds for mutual accusations of failing to prevent border violations. He added that cooperation in guarding Russia's borders with the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is also under discussion.

02/24/04 – Georgian journalists protest closure of media outlets - RFE/RL Newsline

Journalists working for the independent television company Iberia, the monthly journal "Omega," the newspaper "Akhali epokha," and the Media News news agency staged a protest on 21 February against the closure two days earlier of the publishing house owned by their parent company, the Omega Group, on orders from the Prosecutor-General's Office, Caucasus Press reported. Police dispersed the protesters, firing shots into the air. On 23 February, "Omega" Editor in Chief Rostom Chkheidze announced he would begin a hunger strike to demand access to the journal's premises and the right to resume publication. The Prosecutor-General's Office suspects the Omega Group, which is owned by parliamentarian Zaza Okuashvili and is Georgia's largest cigarette importer, of failing to pay excise taxes totaling some 12 million laris (\$5.8 million). Caucasus Press on 21 February quoted Okuashvili as alleging he is being pressured for his refusal to pay an undisclosed sum into a foreign bank account controlled by Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania.

02/24/04 – Former Georgian President's son-in-law remanded in custody - RFE/RL Newsline

Gia Djokhtaberidze, who was arrested at Tbilisi's airport on 20 February, was remanded for three months in pretrial custody on 22 February, Georgian media reported. His offer to pay \$1 million bail was rejected. Djokhtaberidze, the husband of former President Eduard Shevardnadze's daughter, Manana, owns the majority stake in Georgia's

largest cellular-phone company. He has been charged with nonpayment of taxes amounting to 700,000 laris (\$337,044). A spokesman for the Prosecutor-General's Office said on 21 February that a search of Djokhtaberidze's home yielded no evidence relevant to the charges against him, Caucasus Press reported.

02/24/04 – Georgian election registration ends - RFE/RL Newsline

As of the 21 February deadline, five blocs and 37 political parties had registered to participate in the 28 March elections for 150 parliament mandates to be distributed under the proportional-representation system, Caucasus Press reported on 23 February. Candidates from Zhvania's United Democrats will run on the party list of President Mikhail Saakashvili's National Movement. Saakashvili told journalists on 20 February following talks with visiting Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer that the latter's proposal that the barrier for parliamentary representation under the proportional-representation system be reduced from 7 percent to 4 percent or 5 percent would serve to fuel corruption, because "small political parties seek to enter parliament in order to promote their business interests and to carry out illegal transactions," Caucasus Press reported.

02/25/04 – Georgian parliamentarians clash over Adjara - RFE/RL Newsline

Deputies from President Saakashvili's National Movement and from the Union for Democratic Revival, which is headed by Adjar Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze, exchanged insults and then resorted to fisticuffs on 24 February during a debate in which each side accused the other of fuelling a confrontation between Abashidze's supporters and the central government, Caucasus Press and the website of the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported. Parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze sought to defuse tensions, insisting that the problems in relations between Adjara and Tbilisi can be resolved only through peaceful dialogue.

02/25/04 – Georgian official upholds extradition of Chechens - RFE/RL Newsline

Paata Mskhiladze, an expert on international law at the Georgian Prosecutor-General's Office, said on 24 February that the extradition in October 2002 to Russia of five Chechens apprehended two months previously after entering Georgia illegally was in accordance with international law, Caucasus Press and ITAR-TASS reported. The five men appealed their extradition to the European Court of Human Rights, which sent a team of experts to Tbilisi earlier this week to investigate their case. Four of the five men have since been convicted on unspecified charges by a court in Russia's Stavropol Krai.

02/27/04 – Pace pressures Georgia over election law - RFE/RL Newsline

A delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) led by Hungarian parliamentarian Matyas Eorsi met in Tbilisi on 26 and 27 February with Georgian parliamentarians; Central Election Commission Chairman Zurab Chiaberashvili; and his predecessor in that post, Nana Devdariani, Caucasus Press reported. Eorsi expressed concern and indignation at the outgoing parliament's failure to act on the suggestion made in Tbilisi last week by visiting Council of Europe Secretary-General Walter Schwimmer that the barrier for parliamentary representation under the proportional system be reduced from 7 percent to 5 percent of the vote. Eorsi also deplored the failure to amend the composition of election commissions to ensure parity between the authorities and opposition parties.

02/28/04 – Abashidze warns Armenians : Georgia plans to invade Adjara - AZG Armenian Daily

During the meeting with the local Armenian community in Batumi, Adjarian leader Aslan Abashidze again accused central authorities of Georgia of planning an incursion into the Autonomous Republic, Georgian Civil.ge online paper reports.

"They intend an armed aggression with tanks, armored carriers, just like it happened in Abkhazia; and everyone remembers the results of the Abkhaz war",- Aslan Abashidze said.

Georgian central authorities dismissed Abashidze's statement as 'absurd.' 'It seems that Abashidze is far from reality,' Goga Khaindrava, State Minister on conflict resolution stated yesterday.

To remind, the number of Armenians living in Adjara is around 10,000.

DAGHESTAN / DAGHESTAN

01/01/04 – Putin honors troops who quashed Daghestan incursion - RFE/RL

At a 5 January Kremlin ceremony, President Putin awarded medals and orders to a group of military intelligence (GRU) special-forces troops who participated in the military operation against a group of Chechen militants who penetrated into Daghestan on 15 December. An unidentified GRU officer who spoke at the award ceremony said that as a result of the operation "a major group of rebels led by a serious field commander has ceased to exist" and that the public will soon learn more about this.

02/27/04 – Russian official says abducted aid worker still alive - RFE/RL

Presidential aide Yastrzhembskii told journalists in Brussels in 26 February that Arjan Erkel, a Dutch employee of Doctors Without Borders who was abducted in Daghestan in August 2002, is definitely alive, and that Russian intelligence is trying to negotiate his release, ITAR-TASS reported. A spokeswoman for Daghestan's Interior Ministry told Interfax on 12 February that "everything possible is being done" to find and release Erkel. The identity of his abductors remains unclear.

ABKHAZIA / ABKHAZIE

01/04/04 – Georgia poll nothing to do with us – Abkhaz Premier - Radio Russia

Abkhazia is not going to take part in the presidential elections in Georgia, but hopes that the new Georgian leadership will maintain the negotiating process for an Abkhaz settlement. We have nothing to do with the elections taking place in Georgia. They are proceeding in another state, and have nothing at all to do with us, the prime minister of the unrecognized republic, Raul Khajimba, told Interfax (news agency). That is why, he said, Sukhumi (Abkhaz capital) has no interest in who will come to power in Tbilisi as a result of these elections - Saakashvili or anyone else. At the same time, he noted that relations between Abkhazia and Georgia must develop like relations between two independent states.

01/06/04 – Bomb discovered on train in Abkhazia - RFE/RL Newsline

A bomb was discovered on 5 January on a commuter train traveling from the Abkhaz capital, Sukhum, to the Russian resort city of Sochi, Abkhaz Security Service head Givi Agrba told Interfax. The bomb, which was successfully defused, was timed to explode as the train approached the Psou River, which marks the border between Abkhazia and Russia.

01/09/04 – Abkhaz leader proposes signing peace treaty with Georgia - RFE/RL Newsline

Abkhaz Vice President Valerii Arshba told Abkhaz State Television on 8 January that he believes an agreement on peace and the nonresumption of hostilities would constitute a favorable foundation for beginning talks with Georgia's new leadership, Interfax reported. Arshba has suggested such a peace treaty on several occasions since Shevardnadze resigned on 23 November. Arshba also stressed that firm action by the new Georgian leadership "to disband the gangs and armed groups that are committing acts of terrorism and sabotage in Abkhazia" would have "a positive effect on the peace

settlement process and build mutual confidence." The prospects for a rapprochement appear minimal, however, in the light of Georgian President-elect Saakashvili's rejection of a federal model for Georgia and his insistence that Abkhazia should be an autonomous formation within a unitary Georgian state.

01/13/04 – Georgia: Head of Supreme Council of Abkhazia in exile resigns - Rustavi-2 TV

The chairman of the Tbilisi-based Supreme Council of Abkhazia, Tamaz Nadareishvili, as well as his deputies, resigned after four hours of deliberations of the council held behind closed doors, Georgian Rustavi-2 TV has reported.

"My decision was to find a compromise between [my] supporters and opponents. Otherwise, we would have found ourselves in a deadlock," Nadareishvili said and added that he would carry on his duties until a meeting with the elected president. "I do not have the right to make such a decision unless it is approved by the country's authorities," he said.

01/13/04 – Abkhazia drops preconditions for resumption of talks with Tbilisi - RFE/RL Newsline

Abkhazia is ready to resume talks with Georgia with no preconditions, Interfax quoted Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba as saying on 12 January. Shamba's comment came following talks in Sukhum with Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, who is UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's special envoy for the Abkhaz conflict. Shamba said Abkhaz and Georgian representatives will meet at least twice this month to discuss security issues. He also said it is "desirable" that Abkhazia be represented at a UN Security Council session on 31 January at which the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict will be discussed. In recent weeks, Abkhaz Vice President Valerii Arshba has repeatedly said that a resumption of talks with Georgia is contingent on the signing of a treaty on peace and the non-resumption of hostilities and on a crackdown by the Georgian authorities on Georgian guerrilla formations operating in

southern Abkhazia . Speaking in Tbilisi on 12 January, President-elect Saakashvili reaffirmed his commitment to resolving the Abkhaz conflict peacefully, but added in a reference to Arshba's pronouncements that no one can present him with an ultimatum, Caucasus Press reported.

01/16/04 – UN special representative cites Abkhaz readiness for renewed talks - RFE/RL Newsline

The special representative of the UN secretary-general in Georgia, Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, informed acting President Burdjanadze on 15 January that Abkhaz officials are "ready to hold talks with the Georgian side without any conditions," Civil Georgia reported. Tagliavini's announcement follows meetings in the Abkhaz capital, Sukhumi, on 13 January, where Abkhaz leaders dropped any precondition to the resumption of talks with the central Georgian government. Signaling a new willingness to negotiate with the new Georgian leadership, Abkhaz officials have recently proposed the signing of a peace treaty to serve as "favorable foundation" for resuming peace talks .

01/20/04 – Georgian, Abkhaz officials discuss security concerns - RFE/RL Newsline

Georgian and Abkhaz government ministers met in western Georgia on 19 January with representatives of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and of the CIS peacekeeping force to review compliance by both sides with the Protocol on Measures to Defuse Tension and Improve Security Mechanisms on the Zone of Conflict that was signed last October, Caucasus Press reported . The two sides pledged to continue to abide by the 1994 cease-fire agreement; to refrain from any activities that could destabilize the situation in the conflict zone or negatively affect the peace process; and to instruct the law enforcement agencies of both sides to continue their cooperation and to exchange information regularly. Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba, who represented Abkhazia at the meeting, told Interfax on 16 January that Georgian saboteurs continue to

infiltrate Abkhazia's southern-most Gali Raion.

01/20/04 – Detainees confess to planning to kill Georgian guerrilla leader - RFE/RL Newsline

Three men detained by police in western Georgia on 10 January have confessed that they were promised \$30,000 by Abkhaz militant Volmer Butba for the murder of Dato Shengelia, leader of the Forest Brothers Georgian guerrilla group, Caucasus Press reported on 20 January .

01/28/04 – Abkhazia denies responsibility for attack on Georgian police - RFE/RL Newsline

The Interior Ministry of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia issued a statement on 27 January saying that an attack the previous day on a Georgian police post in western Georgia was perpetrated not by members of an Abkhaz-Georgian criminal gang as Georgian officials claim, but by Georgian criminals who escaped last summer from a Georgian jail, Caucasus Press reported . The statement said the escaped prisoners took refuge in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion several weeks ago and were then ordered to leave Abkhaz territory.

01/29/04 – Abkhaz leader reaffirms readiness for dialogue with Georgia - RFE/RL Newsline

Vladislav Ardzinba, president of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia, has issued a statement reaffirming Abkhazia's readiness for talks with the Georgian central government, but at the same time warning that his republic "has the means to protect...its sovereignty and territorial integrity," Interfax and Caucasus Press reported on 28 January. Ardzinba further noted that recent statements by members of Georgia's new leadership cast doubts on their professed commitment to resolving the conflict with Abkhazia by exclusively peaceful means. He appealed to the UN, Russia, and the five-country group known as the Friends of the UN Secretary-General to impress on Tbilisi the need to refrain from

statements and actions that could undermine the peace process.

01/29/04 – As opposition demands his resignation - RFE/RL Newsline

Some 150 members of the opposition movement Amtsakhara and the Independent Federation of Trade Unions staged a demonstration on 28 January outside the parliament building in Sukhum to demand Ardzinba's resignation on the grounds of his failing health and a controversial decree reforming the timber industry that may result in the loss of jobs, Caucasus Press reported the following day. Ardzinba's second presidential term ends in October 2004.

01/30/04 – Abkhaz government rejects calls for President's resignation - RFE/RL Newsline

Deputy Prime Minister Astamur Tarba chaired a closed session of the Abkhaz Council of Ministers and heads of local government bodies on 29 January to discuss demands unveiled the previous day by the opposition movement Amtsakhara for the resignation of ailing President Vladislav Ardzinba, Apsnypress reported . Participants at the meeting adopted an appeal to the population of the unrecognized republic to refrain from exacerbating tensions and to resolve all contentious issues within the framework of the constitution. The statement stressed that the government is taking steps to reform the political system and improve the economic situation. Ardzinba convened a similar meeting on 29 January with senior parliament officials.

01/30/04 – As military, Premier warn against destabilization - RFE/RL Newsline

Also on 29 January, the Abkhaz armed forces issued a statement conceding that some of the criticisms of Ardzinba are justified, but that resorting to "unconstitutional methods" is "inadmissible." Abkhaz Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba similarly admitted that Ardzinba's recent decree on the timber industry has "complicated" the situation,

Apsnypress reported. At the same time, he warned the opposition against further "irresponsible actions that will inevitably lead to the collapse of the Abkhaz state."

02/05/04 - Abkhaz officials welcome Georgian crackdown on criminal gang - RFE/RL Newsline

Givi Agrba, who is chairman of the National Security Service of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia, on 4 February, expressed approval of the Georgian police operation launched earlier that day allegedly to apprehend members of a Georgian gang that engaged in criminal activities in southern Abkhazia, Caucasus Press reported. Abkhaz Vice President Valerii Arshba expressed satisfaction that some members of Georgian guerrilla formations that targeted Abkhaz officials and members of the Russian peacekeeping force were also among the 35 people apprehended during the operation, Caucasus Press reported. He said that if the guerrillas are brought to trial, Abkhazia might withdraw the special detachments it has deployed in the unrecognized republic's southernmost Gali Raion. But Dato Shengelia, leader of the Forest Brothers guerrilla formation, protested the detention of two of his men, Caucasus Press reported. Georgian Interior Minister Giorgi Baramidze, who supervised the 4 February operation, said his troops will not pursue any members of the gang who fled into Abkhaz territory, ITAR-TASS reported.

02/05/04 - While Russian peacekeeping commander says it was unjustified - RFE/RL Newsline

Lieutenant General Aleksandr Yevteev, who commands the Russian peacekeeping force deployed under the CIS aegis in the Abkhaz conflict zone, told Interfax on 4 February that the Georgian operation violated agreements signed in Moscow on stabilizing the situation in the conflict zone. He said Moscow will respond soon to Interior Minister Baramidze's recent allegation that members of the Russian peacekeeping force collaborate with Abkhaz and Georgian gangs engaged in

smuggling goods across the internal border between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia.

02/06/04 - Abkhaz leadership seeks to defuse tensions - RFE/RL Newsline

Abkhaz Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba met in Sukhum on 5 February with representatives of political parties, movements, and NGOs in a bid to end the political crisis triggered by demands by the opposition movement Amsakhara for ailing President Vladislav Ardzinba's resignation, Apsnypress reported the following day. Khadjimba described the crisis as a struggle for power that could prove destructive for the unrecognized republic and its people. He expressed support for the idea of establishing a permanent consultative council on which political parties and movements are represented. The Abkhaz parliament is dominated by supporters of the present leadership. On 3 February, the Forum of National Accord, an umbrella organization encompassing the political movement Aitaira, the People's Party of Abkhazia, and several other organizations, issued a statement offering to work with the leadership to seek a solution to the present crisis, Caucasus Press reported on 4 February.

02/11/04 - Georgian, Abkhaz delegations discuss security issues - RFE/RL Newsline

An Abkhaz government delegation traveled to Tbilisi on 10 February for UN-mediated talks with the Georgian leadership, Georgian and Russian media reported. The Georgians reportedly rejected a demand by the Abkhaz delegation, led by Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba, for the withdrawal of Georgian troops from the upper reaches of the Kodori Gorge and their replacement by CIS peacekeepers and UN observers. Shamba told journalists that the Georgians also rejected their demand for security guarantees, including the disarmament of Georgian armed groups operating in the conflict zone, that would enable Georgians who fled southern Abkhazia during the 1992-93 war to return. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to a non-resumption of

hostilities, Caucasus Press reported, citing a UN statement. They also agreed to hold a follow-up meeting in Sukhum on 20 May.

02/11/04 - As aide says Abkhaz President will not seek third term - RFE/RL Newsline

Vladislav Ardzinba will not seek re-election after his second presidential term expires this fall as the constitution permits one person to serve only two terms, Ardzinba's aide, Astamur Tania, announced in Tbilisi on 10 February on the sidelines of the UN-mediated talks, ITAR-TASS and Caucasus Press reported. Tania added, however, that neither will Ardzinba yield to opposition pressure to step down before his term expires. Tania said the presidential ballot will take place in October, and the precise date will be announced in July.

02/11/04 - Abkhaz security agency denies prior knowledge of Moscow metro bombing - RFE/RL Newsline

The National Security Service of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia has denied any involvement in the 6 February Moscow subway bombing that left at least 39 people dead, Apsnypress reported on 11 February. The statement said that if the Abkhaz leadership had known of the planned attack in advance, it would have alerted Moscow immediately.

On 9 February, Georgian State Security Minister Valeri Khaburzanian claimed that his men had detained a Balkar man allegedly sent by Abkhaz intelligence to Georgia with instructions to inform the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) representative in Tbilisi on 5 February that the bombing was being planned by Chechens who had taken refuge in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge.

02/13/04 - Georgians demand arrest of Abkhaz criminal kingpin - RFE/RL Newsline

At the weekly meeting between Georgian and Abkhaz authorities and representatives of the UN Observer Mission and the Russian peacekeeping force deployed in the Abkhaz conflict zone, the Georgian representative demanded on 12

February that the Abkhaz take measures against reputed criminal kingpin Volmer Butba, who operates in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion, Caucasus Press reported. Butba allegedly dispatched hired killers to western Georgia last month to murder guerrilla leader Dato Shengelia. Meanwhile, the Abkhaz representative at the 12 February meeting said their investigations have ruled out the possibility that Georgian NGO head David Badzagua, who was kidnapped in western Georgia late last month, is being held captive in Abkhazia.

02/17/04 - Abkhazia boycotts talks under UN aegis - RFE/RL Newsline

The Abkhaz leadership has declined to send a delegation to attend talks in Geneva on 17-18 February on the Abkhaz conflict, Caucasus Press reported. The talks involve UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's special envoy Heidi Tagliavini, and representatives of the Georgian government and of the five countries (Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) that belong to the Friends of the UN Secretary-General group tasked with seeking a solution to the conflict. Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba said the unrecognized republic will not send a representative, as the meeting is to discuss a UN-drafted proposal that assumes Abkhazia is an integral part of Georgia. Shamba also said he considers the Coordinating Council established in 1997 under the UN aegis a more appropriate forum for talks on resolving the conflict. On 15 February, Abkhaz Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba flew to Moscow for talks with the Russian leadership, Caucasus Press reported.

02/18/04 - Abkhazia protests Georgian President's statement - RFE/RL Newsline

The Foreign Ministry of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia has released a statement protesting Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's comment while visiting Moscow on 11 February that Abkhazia functions as a corridor for drug trafficking, and that the Abkhaz authorities were involved in the 6 February Moscow metro bombing, Caucasus Press reported. The

statement said Saakashvili's pronouncements were intended to create a negative image of Abkhazia, while Tbilisi's policies are aimed at isolating Abkhazia economically.

02/19/04 - Abkhaz President proposes postponing local elections - RFE/RL Newsline

Vladislav Ardzinba, who is under pressure from opposition parties to step down as president before his second term expires this fall, proposed on 18 February postponing the local elections scheduled for 14 March and holding them concurrently with the presidential ballot in October, Caucasus Press reported. Ardzinba said doing so would save on costs.

02/27/04 - Georgian President accuses Abkhaz of ethnic cleansing - RFE/RL Newsline

Addressing the UN Security Council on 26 February, President Mikheil Saakashvili accused the authorities of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia of pursuing a policy of deliberate ethnic cleansing, RFE/RL's UN correspondent reported. Saakashvili alleged that "we are talking about a situation in which just being ethnically Georgian automatically means being killed if you enter that territory." Members of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia say, however, that thousands of ethnic Georgians who fled Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion during the 1992-93 war have returned and live permanently or semi-permanently in their old homes. The International Criminal Court in The Hague last year rejected a demand by the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government in exile to bring formal charges of genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Abkhaz authorities, according to Caucasus Press on 27 November.

02/27/04 - And urges security Council action - RFE/RL Newsline

President Saakashvili on 26 February argued that the UN Security Council should exert pressure on the Abkhaz leadership to accept a solution to the conflict that would bestow on Abkhazia "the highest degree of autonomy," RFE/RL reported. Abkhaz leaders argue that the unrecognized

republic's population has chosen independence. For that reason, Sukhum has consistently refused to accept as a basis for discussion a UN draft document on resolving the conflict that envisages Abkhazia as an integral part of Georgia.

***NORTH OSSETIA /
OSSETIE DU NORD***

02/04/04 - Two killed by North Ossetia car bomb - RFE/RL

Two people were killed and eight wounded on 3 February when a car bomb exploded in the center of Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia, Russian media reported. The republic's Interior Ministry believes the blast, in the vicinity of the Gamid Bank, was either the work of terrorists or part of a criminal dispute. The car used for the bombing carried the license plates of a vehicle reported stolen last year.

***SOUTH OSSETIA /
OSSETIE DU SUD***

01/27/04 - South Ossetian leaders fear new Georgian aggression - RFE/RL Newsline

Eduard Kokoyty, president of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, has expressed concern that the Georgian authorities are preparing to launch a military campaign under the pretext of a crackdown on smuggling in an attempt to bring his breakaway republic back under the control of the central Georgian government, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported on 26 January. South Ossetian parliament speaker Stanislav Kochiev similarly told the head of the OSCE office in Tskhinvali, Gancho Ganchev, that recent predictions by President Saakashvili and Georgian Patriarch Ilia II that Georgia's territorial unity will soon be restored have triggered alarm among the population of South Ossetia, Interfax reported on 26 January.

CHECHNYA / TCHETCHENIE

01/01/04 – Chechen radical claims responsibility for suicide bombings - RFE/RL

Russian presidential aide Sergei Yastrzhembskii told journalists in Moscow on 24 December that Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev claimed in a statement posted the previous day on kavkazcenter.com to have masterminded the suicide bombings of a commuter train in the North Caucasus on 5 December and a hotel in Moscow two days later, Reuters reported. Yastrzhembskii added that the Russian authorities have no proof to substantiate Basaev's claim. But on 19 December, FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev told journalists that Basaev was responsible for both bombings.

01/01/04 – Chechen leader wants control over Federal agencies - RFE/RL

Speaking at a press conference in Moscow on 23 December, pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov criticized what he termed a lack of coordination among the various federal agencies -- the Interior Ministry, the Defense Ministry and the FSB --operating in Chechnya, Interfax reported. He proposed that the local operations of those agencies be temporarily subordinated to the Chechen Interior Ministry. Kadyrov also again criticized Moscow's approach to financing reconstruction in Chechnya. He said Chechnya should retain a larger share of the profits from its oil industry.

01/14/04 – Chechen displaced persons camps to close - RFE/RL

The three remaining camps in Ingushetia for displaced persons who fled the fighting in Chechnya over the past four years are to be closed by 1 March, Russian media reported on 12 January, quoting Chechen officials. The population of the three camps is estimated at 4,600. Acting Chechen Prime Minister Eli Isaev told ITAR-TASS

that "there are no reasons for people to remain in tent camps where living conditions are unbearable." He said there are "no obstacles" to residents of those camps returning to Chechnya. Vakha Baybatirov, who is chairman of the Chechen government committee on compensation and forced migration, said camp residents will be paid compensation for their destroyed homes. Ingushetian President Murat Zyazikov discussed the planned refugee return with Russian Interior Ministry officials on 10 January, ITAR-TASS reported.

01/22/04 – Putin dismisses Human Rights commissioner for Chechnya - RFE/RL

President Putin issued a decree on 21 January dismissing Abdul-Khakim Sultygov as human rights commissioner for Chechnya and abolishing the position entirely, Russian media reported. That move, according to chechenpress.info, was taken at the urging of pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov, upon whom responsibility for protecting human rights in Chechnya now devolves. Sultygov had served in that post since July 2002.

02/02/04 – Five security guards killed in Chechen raid - RFE/RL

Five members of pro-Moscow Chechen leader Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov's personal security detachment were shot dead on the morning of 1 February by 10 armed assailants who forced their way into a house in the village of Alleroi, Russian media reported. Kadyrov's son, Ramzan, who heads his father's security guards, said the attackers will be apprehended within seven days, and that he has offered a reward of \$200,000 for information about their whereabouts. He said the leader of the group of attackers, Akhmed Avturkhanov, was wounded in the attack.

02/05/04 – European Parliament Deputies back International administration in Chechnya - RFE/RL

On 4 February, 145 of the 624 deputies to the European parliament signed a statement of support for the proposal by Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov to establish an interim UN administration in Chechnya. Maskhadov's plan calls for the establishment of a provisional government in Chechnya under UN auspices and for the disarming of the Chechen armed resistance. "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on 5 February quoted an unnamed organizer of the European Parliament campaign to collect signatures in support of the proposal as saying, "I believe that this is the only way of resolving the Russian-Chechen problem."

02/06/04 – Presidential envoy denies Chechen involvement in metro bombing - RFE/RL

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov's representative Akhmed Zakaev told RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service on 6 February that neither Maskhadov nor the Chechen government (in which Zakaev is a deputy prime minister) bears any responsibility for the bombing. "Terrorism is not our method," Zakaev said. "There can be no justification for terror against the civilian population." He predicted that "Russian special services will very soon blame the Chechens for the Moscow metro explosion. But we are also convinced that sooner or later, as in the previous terror attacks, it will be discovered that the Russian special service were indirectly behind this appalling crime." Maskhadov has repeatedly ordered his fighters to observe the Geneva Conventions, not to target civilians, and not to launch any military activities outside Chechnya.

02/12/04 – Kremlin aide says talks with Chechen leader pointless - RFE/RL

Aslanbek Aslakhanov, who withdrew his candidacy for the Chechen presidential election in September to accept a position as President Putin's adviser on Chechnya, told journalists in Moscow on 11

February that Aslan Maskhadov, who was elected Chechen president in January 1997 in a ballot recognized by both the Russian leadership and the international community, no longer has any right to speak in the name of the Chechen people or to propose programs for resolving the Chechen conflict, ITAR-TASS and Interfax reported. Aslakhonov said that the March 2003 referendum on a new Chechen Constitution stripped Maskhadov of his legitimacy. He argued that "never, under any circumstances," should Moscow agree to hold talks with "terrorists." Both before and after his election in August 2000 to represent Chechnya in the Russian State Duma, Aslakhonov repeatedly called on the Russian leadership to begin peace talks with Maskhadov's representative.

02/17/04 – Former acting Chechen President killed in Qatar - RFE/RL

Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, who served as acting Chechen president for several months following the murder in April 1996 of Djokhar Dudaev, died on 13 February in a Qatar hospital of injuries received when a remote-controlled bomb destroyed his car earlier that day, Russian news agencies reported. Yandarbiev had lived in Qatar for several years; the Qatar authorities had ignored several Russian requests for his extradition. Russian security services have repeatedly claimed that Yandarbiev was responsible for channeling funds from Saudi Arabia to the Chechen resistance, and Russian and Chechen officials suggested on 13 and 14 February that disputes over those funds may have been the motive for his killing. But in a 13 February statement posted on chechenpress.com, the Chechen leadership headed by President Maskhadov accused Russian security services of masterminding the bombing.

02/24/04 – President of Chechnya a mentions Armenian Genocide - Arminfo

It has ever occurred to anybody to forget the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide why should we, the Chechens, forget the tragedy which befell us, the

president of Chechnya Ahmad Kadyrov said in an interview with INTERFAX commenting on the tragic events of Feb 23 1944 when Iosif Stalin ordered to deport Chechens from their homes.

The historical justice has not been restored to date - no law has been drafted so far to rehabilitate the repressed Chechens and Ingushes. The president of Ingushetia Murat Zyazikov sent Monday telegrams to his Kazakh and Kyrgyz counterparts Nursultan Nazarbaev and Askar Akaev thanking their peoples for the hand they gave to Chechens and Ingushes during the Stalin repressions. He says that Feb 23 1944 is the most tragic day of the Ingush people. Half of Ingushes were killed then.

02/27/04 – Russian media debate who killed Chechen Ex-President - RFE/RL

"Vremya novostei" wrote on 27 February that the murder charges filed in Qatar against two Russian special-services employees for their alleged role in former acting Chechen President Yandarbiev's assassination are creating "a dirty and noisy scandal...without precedent in the history of the new Russia."

"Nezavisimaya gazeta" that day said the Foreign Ministry, by paying so much attention in its statements to Yandarbiev's alleged terrorist activities, reduced the likelihood that the jailed special-services employees would be freed. "What is more, the statements can be taken as a confirmation by the Foreign Ministry that Moscow had...serious motives to eliminate Yandarbiev."

However, "Kommersant-Daily" on 27 February quoted unnamed special-services employees as saying that even if Yandarbiev's assassination had been ordered, it would not have been carried out by staff employees officially dispatched to Qatar but by "secret agents...in no way directly connected to Russia." "Russia does not carry out political murders abroad, otherwise [former KGB Major General Oleg] Kalugin and [former FSB Colonel Aleksandr] Litvinenko and another 10 traitors would have been eliminated long ago," one source added.

NAGORNO KARABAKH / HAUT KARABAGH

01/12/04 – Turkey again offers to mediate between Armenia, Azerbaijan - RFE/RL

Visiting Baku on 9-10 January, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul met with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, parliament speaker Murtuz Alesqerov, Prime Minister Artur Rasizade, and Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliev to discuss the Karabakh conflict and various aspects of bilateral relations, according to Turan, AP, and Azerbaijani media, cited by Groong. Gul called for reversing the recent decline in bilateral trade (which currently stands at \$300 million), and said Ankara is willing to host trilateral talks with Armenia and Azerbaijan on resolving the Karabakh conflict. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan made a similar proposal when visiting Baku one year ago. Gul said any solution to the conflict must preserve Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Gul also said Turkey will not open a border crossing with Armenia as long as Armenia occupies Azerbaijani territory, according to the Turkish TRT 2 television channel, as cited by Groong.

01/14/04 - Armenia condemns Azerbaijan for preventing military officers from attending NATO conference - Associated Press Worldstream

Armenia condemned Azerbaijan on Wednesday for preventing three Armenian military officers from attending a conference under the aegis of NATO's Partnership for Peace.

The Foreign Ministry said that the three officers were not allowed to board a plane at the Istanbul airport on Tuesday to travel to the Azerbaijani capital, Baku. Azerbaijani authorities requested that the officers be turned away, the ministry said.

The officers were to have taken part in a conference to prepare for the Cooperative Best Effort-2004 military exercise, which is to be held in Azerbaijan.

"This unprecedented step by the Azerbaijani authorities throws into doubt the achievement of the true goals of the program, which include establishing an atmosphere of mutual trust and widening the dialogue between countries in the Euro-Atlantic region," said Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian. He said that Armenia hoped its partners in the program would take appropriate steps to respond to Azerbaijan's move.(...)

01/14/04 - Armenia to continue efforts to solve Karabakh conflict - Mediamax news agency

Yerevan, 14 January: Yerevan will continue its work aimed at solving the Nagornyy Karabakh problem in 2004, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian said in Yerevan today.

As Mediamax news agency reported, Vardan Oskanian said that the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group intend to meet in Vienna in the near future and discuss their future steps.

The head of the Armenian Foreign Ministry noted that the meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, Robert Kocharyan and Ilham Aliyev, in Geneva last December gave "a definite positive boost" to the settlement process which was rather stagnant in 2003 because of the presidential elections in Armenia and Azerbaijan and the worsening of Heydar Aliyev's health.

01/16/04 - U.S. Department of State comment on Armenian delegation's participation in the initial planning conference for PFP cooperative best effort 2004 exercise - Arminfo

The United States is disappointed that an official delegation from the Armenian Ministry of Defense was unable to join the initial planning conference for the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Cooperative Best Effort 2004 exercise, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, January 13-15. We do not yet have all the facts about why the Armenian delegation was denied the opportunity to travel to Baku on January 13, says the statement by the U.S. Department of State provided to ARMINFO by the U.S. Embassy in Armenia. (...)

01/21/04 - U.S. "disappointed" by Armenian absence from Baku Nato planning conference - RFE/RL

In a statement released on 20 January by the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, the State Department expressed "disappointment" that an Armenian Defense Ministry delegation was unable to travel last week to Azerbaijan to attend a planning conference for military exercises to be held in Azerbaijan later this year within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, Noyan Tapan and RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. The statement noted that Washington does not yet have full information about why the Armenian officers were prevented from flying from Istanbul to Baku.

01/21/04 - Armenia Rejects Azeri Calls for New OSCE Karabagh Plan - RFE/RL

Armenia on Wednesday rejected Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's calls for a new internationally sponsored plan to resolve the Mountainous Karabagh conflict that would return the disputed territory under Baku's control.

Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said the French, Russian, and US mediators should stick to agreements that were reached by the two parties in 2001 which would uphold Karabagh's de facto independence.

The mediating trio, which heads the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was again criticized by Aliyev on Tuesday for allegedly not doing enough to restore his country's territorial integrity. "They have to develop new suggestions and put more pressure on the aggressor," he told reporters in Baku.

Aliyev also renewed Azerbaijani threats to win back the Armenian-controlled region by force if the negotiation process remains in stalemate. "Azerbaijan has the full right to liberate its lands, using all possibilities," he said.

Oskanian defended the Minsk Group co-chairs' track record, saying that Baku is unhappy with the mediators because they have not adopted a pro-Azerbaijani stance.

"We can only express hope that what has been achieved until now will remain in force and we will continue to build upon it," he said. "It would be an unfortunate loss of time if all of sudden the process were to be rolled back and re-launched from scratch."

The negotiators announced no new written proposals on Karabagh when they visited Baku, Stepanakert, and Yerevan last month, effectively resuming the peace process that had been put on hold due to the 2003 presidential elections in Armenia and Azerbaijan; however, their trip, as well as the ensued first-ever meeting in Geneva between Kocharian and Aliyev, shed no light on the current prospects for a Karabagh settlement.

The Minsk Group co-chairs held a planned meeting in Vienna earlier this week but issued no statements afterwards. "I strongly doubt that they discussed any new proposals," Oskanian said.

Armenian officials say further progress in the conflict resolution depends on Aliyev's willingness and ability to embrace agreements reached by his father and President Robert Kocharian during a series of peace talks in Paris and the Florida island of Key West in the spring of 2001. Azerbaijan continues to deny that any major deals were cut at the time, however.

The Paris talks were personally mediated by French President Jacques Chirac, who is scheduled to receive Aliyev later this Friday as part of the latter's official visit to France. The Karabagh issue is expected to be high on the agenda of the meeting.

Oskanian said he hopes Chirac will remind the Azerbaijani leader of the essence of what the Armenian side describes as "the Paris principles" of resolving the Karabagh dispute. "He was present at the meeting between Heydar Aliyev and Kocharian and maybe Ilham Aliy.

01/23/04 - Envoy says EU not to mediate Azeri-Armenian talks - Turan news agency

The European Union stands for deepening cooperation with the countries of the South Caucasus, the special representative of the European Union for the South Caucasus, Heikki Talvitie, told a news conference in Baku today.(...)

Touching on the Karabakh topic, the EU special representative said the European Union supports the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group. He added that the EU was also ready to provide assistance in alleviating the consequences of the conflict after a peace accord was signed. However, the EU has no intention of engaging in mediation activities thus duplicating the Minsk Group.(...)

01/23/04 - France pledges support to help resolve Nagorno-Karabakh dispute - Agence France Presse

French President Jacques Chirac on Friday reassured Azeri leader Ilham Aliyev of his government's willingness to help Azerbaijan and Armenia resolve their dispute over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. Aliyev -- making his first official trip abroad since succeeding his father in October as president of the oil-rich Caucasus state -- met with Chirac at the Elysee presidential palace for talks and a working lunch.

On Nagorno-Karabakh, Chirac reaffirmed "France's availability to support Azerbaijan and Armenia in their efforts to jointly find a lasting solution to this conflict," his office said. (...)

Earlier, Aliyev called on Paris to play a key role in resolving the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, a sparsely-populated mountainous territory with a mainly ethnic Armenian population that is officially part of Azerbaijan.(...)

01/28/04 - Armenian foreign minister rejects Turkey's mediation in Karabakh conflict - Arminfo

Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan has flatly rejected the idea that Turkey could broker a solution to the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict, the minister said in an interview with Armenian Public TV. At the same time, the minister stated the possibility of trilateral Armenian-Turkish-Azerbaijani meetings, proceeding from tasks of regional cooperation. Two such meetings have already been held and it is known that the Turkish foreign minister is talking about a third meeting, Vardan Oskanyan noted. "As long as no intentions concerning Turkey's mediation in the settlement of the Karabakh

conflict have been declared, all sides are ready to sit at a negotiating table as equal parties and discuss the problems that concern all of us, particularly, regional problems. Armenia does not see any problems in this and we shall go for this dialogue in a trilateral format," the Armenian foreign minister said. He added that the discussion of regional conflicts, particularly the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict, was not ruled out within the framework of such meetings.

"But Turkey cannot be a mediator in this issue as long as its foreign policy does not suggest an equal attitude to both sides," the minister stressed.

01/28/04 - Armenian minister insists on Key West principles on Karabakh settlement - Arminfo

The situation in the talks process on the settlement of the Nagornyy Karabakh conflict has changed since President Ilham Aliyev came to power in Azerbaijan, Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan has told Armenian Public TV.

Oskanyan said that during [Azerbaijani ex-President] Heydar Aliyev's rule the problem was very close to a settlement, because, given various circumstances, Heydar Aliyev was ready to make serious moves and serious compromises. His assessment of the situation was realistic and he believed that he had the moral right to make serious moves and persuade the Azerbaijani people that these moves served the Azerbaijani people's national interests. All the aforementioned was reflected in the Key West agreements [at talks between the Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents in the USA in 2001]. Later, however, the Azerbaijani leader gave up this position because Heydar Aliyev's entourage, including incumbent President Ilham Aliyev, considered that these moves would make the Azerbaijani administration vulnerable. That was why they were against the Key West agreements and did their best to hamper their implementation. Today Ilham Aliyev continues "in this way" because he realizes his own weakness and understands that he has no moral right to raise issues of this kind before his people and his opposition. That is why the situation in the talks process has naturally

changed, Oskanyan said. He added that the Armenian side, however, did not lose hope of success in the talks process.

Speaking about the settlement and particularly commenting on Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Quliyev's statement that the Key West and Paris agreements are "far-fetched", Oskanyan said that if Heydar Aliyev had not shown these documents to Quliyev, he was ready to show them to his Azerbaijani colleague at their next meeting and even give him a copy of these documents. As for whether these agreements are still in force, this is a completely different problem. No document can have legal force until the sides are engaged in talks on it. As of today, the Azerbaijani side refuses to hold talks on these documents. But the Armenian side believes that they are a serious base for continuation of the talks as well as for settlement of the problem as a whole, Oskanyan said.

01/28/04 - NKR Official denies Azeri accusations of using NK for drug transit - Mediamax news agency

The first deputy interior minister of the Nagornyy Karabakh Republic (NKR), Arshavir Garamyan, has described as "vain" Azerbaijan's attempts to present Nagornyy Karabakh as an uncontrolled territory reportedly used for the production and transit of drugs.

Commenting in an interview with Mediamax on statements by senior Azerbaijani officials at a recent international conference on illegal drug trafficking in Baku, Garamyan said that their aim was to discredit the NKR authorities in the eyes of the international community.

Garamyan added that the NKR law-enforcement agencies carried out an operation called "Poppy" even during the war, which helped reduce the number of drug-related crimes. Garamyan told Mediamax that the Karabakh authorities had repeatedly asked international organizations to send a mission of independent observers to examine the situation in Nagornyy Karabakh.

"The fact that Azerbaijan has been doing everything possible to prevent the establishment of this group and its visit to Nagornyy Karabakh shows that the Baku government's accusations are far-fetched," Garamyan said.

He added that "representatives of the international organizations accredited in Nagorny Karabakh, particularly, the OSCE, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Halo Trust [Britain], who have free access to all NKR districts and neighbouring territories, have never confirmed the so-called 'facts' publicized by Azerbaijan".

02/05/04 – No incidents during regular monitoring of the contact line of NKR and Azerbaijani armed forces - Arka

The regular monitoring of the contact line of NKR and Azerbaijani armed forces at Seisulan village of Martakerd region NKR passed without any incidents and according to schedule. NKR Foreign Ministry reports that the monitoring from the position of the NKR defence army was led by Personal Representative of OSCE Acting Chairman, Ambassador Andrei Kasperjic. The group consisted of field aids to the Personal Representative of OSCE Acting Chairman, Genadi Korzh (Ukraine) and Urgan Schmidt (Germany). Upon the monitoring, the mission members visited a soldier from the NKR Defence Army wounded by Azerbaijani forces.

02/05/04 – NKR President Arkady Ghukassian receives Ambassador Andrei Kasperjic - Arka

NKR President Arkady Ghukassian received Personal Representative of OSCE Acting Chairman, Ambassador Andrei Kasperjic. NKR President's press service reports that they discussed the situation on the contact line of NKR and Azerbaijani armed forces. The parties highlighted the importance of observing cease-fire and positively assessed the regular monitoring by the OSCE mission. The parties shared their views on the current process of negotiations on NKR conflict resolution and the perspectives.

02/09/04 – Crimes in NKR in 2003 decreased by 9% - Arka

Crimes in NKR in 2003 decreased by 9% and made to 605 crimes as against 668 in 2002, NKR MIA told ARKA. The number of crimes at the

line of criminal investigation also decreased almost by 9%. Cases of premeditated murders, rapes, premeditated damage of state and public property and others also decreased in report period. Figures committed crimes decreased by 8%.

In the whole, disclosure of crimes increased by 5%, at the line of criminal investigation - by 6%. In 2003 MIA and other law-enforcement bodies revealed 64 economic crimes (36 in 2002) and registered 1 case of bribery.

02/12/04 – Satellite press-conferences Yerevan-Baku : Armenian and Azerbaijani journalists interested in regional cooperation and the mountainous Karabagh problem – Yerevan Press Club Weekly Newsletter

On February 6 and 10 two more satellite press-conferences Yerevan - Baku were held under the project of Yerevan and Baku Press Clubs "Possible Resolutions to the Karabagh Conflict: Expert Evaluations and Media Coverage". The project is implemented with the support of OSI Network Media Program. Technical assistance in the conductance of the satellite bridge was provided by "Mir" Interstate TV and Radio Company and Internews.

On February 6 the questions of Armenian journalists were answered by the President of Azerbaijani Center of Economic and Political Research and the Entrepreneurship Development Fund Sabit Bagirov. The Armenian media representatives were mostly interested in the prospects of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, influence of Karabagh problem on the economy of the parties to the conflict, possibilities of regional cooperation, the situation of refugees and the human rights practices in Azerbaijan.

On February 10 the Yerevan studio hosted the Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Ruben Shugarian. The questions of Azerbaijani journalists in Baku studio mostly referred to Karabagh conflict, in particular, the position of the official Yerevan on the issue and its possible resolutions: whether Armenia has new approaches to the resolution of Karabagh conflicts, whether the mediating mission of OSCE Minsk Group has exhausted itself, if there

is a potential for the peaceful resolution, what the attitude of Armenia is to the role of the European Union, NATO and other international structures in this process, etc.

Issues of regional security and cooperation with other states having interest in South Caucasus - the USA, Russia, Iran, Turkey - were discussed.

02/25/04 – Nagorno Karabagh Republic President Arkadi Ghukassian signs a decree on structural changes in the government - Arka

Nagorno Karabagh Republic President Arkadi Ghukassian signed a decree on structural changes in the government. The President press service reports that the internal affairs ministry is reorganized into Policy at the NKR Government, the State Department of national security into the National Security Service at the NKR Government; the State Tax Department into the State Tax Service at the NKR Government and the State Department of Justice into the NKR Ministry of Justice. By another decree, Armen Issaguklov is released from the position of Internal Affairs' Minister and appointed Chief of the Police; Bako Sahakianm released from the office of the State Security Department office and appointed to the office of State Security Service Director; Hakop Karghamanian released from the office of State Tax Department head and assigned the head of the State Tax Service; and Robert Hayrapetian released from the post of State Department of Justice and appointed as NKR Minister of Justice.

02/26/04 – Stepanakert holds a crowded demonstration condemning the Armenian officer's murder – Arka News Agency

A crowded demonstration was held in Stepanakert today in front of the Foreign Ministry of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic organised by initiative of youth and student organisations. The demonstrators severely condemned the cruel murder of the Armenian military officer in Budapest in February 19 by a senior lieutenant of Azerbaijani

army on Partnership for Peace NATO Program English courses. As reported by ARKA Stepanakert correspondent the participants of the demonstration addressed an open letter of protest to Co-Chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group. The letter particularly mentions that 'this crime is a logic outcome of anti-Armenian propaganda of the Azerbaijani authorities and its recent bellicose statements'. The document contains a call to the international community to respect self-determination right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and not to trust to Azerbaijan. 'Other approach not only threatens the security of Nagorno-Karabakh and its people, but also it will lead to destabilization of the situation in the South Caucasus', the appeal stresses. (...)

On February 19, at 5:30 a.m. Gourgen Margaryan, the Lieutenant of Armenian Armed Forces, who was in Budapest on business, namely for learning English in the framework of 'Partnership for Peace' program, was cruelly massacred when sleeping with an axe by an Azerbaijani officer, who was there on the same program. The murderer was arrested by the Hungarian Police.

Azerbaijani Ministry of Defence confirmed the fact that Ramil Safarov who committed a murder was in Budapest for learning English in the framework of 'Partnership for Peace' programme.

02/26/04 - Final Solution of Karabagh Conflict Impossible without Full Participation of MKR - Asbarez

The speaker of Mountainous Karabagh Republic's (MKR) Parliament Oleg Yesayan briefed representatives of foreign non-governmental organizations, on MKR's legislative efforts to establish democratic values. Yesayan said that international attention will, in fact, turn to MKR, when it succeeds in building a civil society. "We realize that we have not reached this goal yet, but have progressed greatly. As such, we have earned the right to present our achievements to the world." The delegation included the former British ambassador to Georgia Stephen Nash, who serves as the director of Links, a London information network on conflicts and

state-building, Links South Caucasus coordinator Julian Broxap, Paul Lauwerence of International Alert, and Richard Hoffman of "Catholic Relief Services." Yesayan said he is pleased that European NGOs attach importance to establishing peace and stability in the region, and take efforts to help regulate conflicts, including the Karabagh conflict. Asked to clarify MKR's position on the regulation of the conflict, Yesayan said that Karabagh adheres to a peaceful regulation to the conflict, within the framework of OSCE Minsk Group. He stressed, however, that a final and comprehensive solution remains impossible without full participation of MKR. Established in London in June 1997, Links supports peaceful resolution of conflicts in the Caucasus, with particular reference to conflicts in Abkhazia, Mountainous Karabagh, South Ossetia, and Chechnya. One of its declared objectives is to work closely with the people in these societies to bring about the peaceful resolution of the conflicts, to work to promote democratic state-building and sustainable economic progress, and "to promote dialogue between different sides in conflict, as well as to promote innovative ideas for long-term solutions."

02/26/04 - Sarkisian Sees No Imminent Deal on Karabagh - Eurasianet/RFE/RL

Defense Minister Serge Sarkisian said on Tuesday that he expects no imminent breakthrough on the Mountainous Karabagh peace talks, and that the Armenian side should not be too worried. Sarkisian pointed to Azeri President Ilham Aliyev's statement that Baku is in no hurry to achieve a compromise solution to the Karabagh dispute because he [Aliyev] believes its consequences are more damaging for Armenia. According to a senior official from the Council of Europe who visited Baku last week, the new Azeri leader sees less urgency in the Karabagh settlement than his late father and predecessor Heydar Aliyev did.

The official, Pietro Ago, said in Yerevan on Friday that Ilham wants to "concentrate on internal problems like the economy and social affairs so that he could improve his own position and

popularity" at home. Opposition activists in Azerbaijan are intensifying political attacks on Aliyev, saying his first 100 days in power have been marked by a significant rise in government repression and corruption. One Aliyev critic described the government as presiding over a "stagnation period." Aliyev marked his 100th day in power on February 7. Over that span, the government has cracked down on opposition political activity and muzzled the media. The Aliyev administration's behavior since the October 15 presidential election has drawn sharp criticism from global organizations, especially New York-based Human Rights Watch, and international governmental bodies, including the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. The government crackdown sowed disarray among opposition parties. Of late, though, there have been signs that administration opponents are starting to regroup. Despite the ongoing threat of arrest and harassment, Aliyev critics sounded off in early February. (...)

02/26/04 - Hovhannisian Says OSCE Report Neutral, but Concerned about Armenian Refugees - Armenpress/Yerkir

National Assembly Vice Speaker Vahan Hovhannisian praised the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on the Mountainous Karabagh Conflict Goran Lenmarker, for preparing an unbiased and report, submitted last week to the Assembly's session in Vienna. Hovhannisian, who also heads Armenia's delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, added that the report can be instrumental in the work conducted by the OSCE Minsk Group, which is tasked with finding a resolution to the conflict. The final version of the report will be discussed at the Parliamentary Assembly's next session to take place July 5-9 in Edinburgh, Scotland. Lenmarker is scheduled to visit MKR during a spring visit to the region--something the Armenian delegation has consistently pushed for said Hovhannisian, since "no report would be complete and comprehensive without visiting Karabagh." Hovhannisian pointed

out, however, that Lenmarker's report, which views the return of refugees as the most pressing question, raises concerns. Lenmarker's report was presented on February 19, the day Armenian officer Gurchen Markaryan was ax murdered by an Azeri classmate in Budapest.

Talking about the incident and issues tied to the return of refugees, Hovhannisian stressed that the international community, specifically NATO, should not only be shaken by the brutal murder, but also react with due seriousness. "The return of Azeri refugees to Mountainous Karabagh and Armenia presupposes the return of Armenian refugees to Baku and Sumgait, but if an Azeri is able to kill an Armenian in his sleep with an ax, this means that the return of Armenian refugees is ruled out." He stressed that Azerbaijan must realize that its refugees cannot return--given that Armenians would never agree to move back to Azerbaijan.

INGUSHETIA / INGOUCHIE

01/01/04 – Ingush Deputy Interior Minister killed - RFE/RL

Apti Khakiev died of injuries received when his car came under fire on 28 December in the village of Alkhasty, Interfax reported. A Russian serviceman has been arrested and has reportedly confessed to the shooting, which he claimed was an accident during a quail shoot, according to ingushetiya.ru on 29 December. Khakiev, who was 36, joined the Interior Ministry in 1992.

01/22/04 – Ingushetian President again rules out remerger with Chechnya - RFE/RL

Speaking on 21 January at a press conference in Moscow, Murat Zyazikov rejected once again the idea of reuniting Chechnya and Ingushetia as a single federation subject. Zyazikov acknowledged that the Chechen and Ingush peoples are ethnically closely related, and stressed that "I grew up

in Grozny and care about everything that is happening there." But he argued that reunification is inappropriate at present. Zyazikov recalled that he and his Chechen counterpart Kadyrov signed an agreement last year formalizing the administrative border between the two neighboring republics. Zyazikov added that those interest groups lobbying for reunification "should find other things to do."

01/30/04 – Deadline for return of displaced persons to Chechnya dropped - RFE/RL

The Russian authorities have abolished the 1 March deadline by which residents were supposed to leave three displaced-persons camps in Ingushetia, UN Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland told journalists in Moscow on 29 January, Reuters reported. He said he pointed out to Russian officials that imposing such a deadline contradicts statements that the return of Chechen displaced persons to Chechnya is purely voluntary. Egeland visited Chechnya and Ingushetia earlier this week, and characterized the plight of the civilian population and displaced persons in Chechnya as "critical," according to Reuters on 27 January.

02/17/04 – Chechen, Ingush officials deny displaced persons will be forcibly repatriated - RFE/RL

Ingushetia's President Murat Zyazikov denied on 13 February that camps in Ingushetia for displaced persons who fled Chechnya during the ongoing hostilities will be shut down and the residents forcibly repatriated, Interfax reported. He said no deadline for the return of displaced persons to Chechnya exists, and that any who wish to remain in Ingushetia may do so. Acting Chechen Prime Minister Eli Isaev similarly told Interfax that "there are no plans or dates for a forced repatriation and closure of the camps." He said the 1 March deadline announced last month "was set for officials," but that the Chechen authorities should create conditions by that date to enable those displaced persons who wish to return to Chechnya to do so. In January, Isaev argued that

conditions in the displaced persons' camps were appalling, while superior accommodation was already available for displaced persons in Grozny with mains water, electricity, and gas, and school facilities. On 13 February, Lyudmila Alekseeva of the Moscow Helsinki Group told Interfax that residents of displaced persons camps are under increasing pressure to leave the camps and return to Chechnya.

SOUTH RUSSIA / RUSSIE DU SUD

01/22/04 – A happy ending for the Meskhetians in Kuban ? - RFE/RL

More than 15,000 Meskhetians living in Krasnodar Krai have been registered, and 4,000 have received Russian citizenship, RIA-Novosti reported on 21 January.

The Interior Ministry is currently reviewing the applications of another 2,800 Meskhetians. The Meskhetians had been refused even temporary registration since October 2001, making it difficult for them to register their children or to lease land. Last year, during a meeting with Cossacks and World War II veterans, President Putin said the Meskhetians have the right to return to their historic homeland in Georgia and that this question has been raised with Tbilisi more than once. Speaking at a pressconference in Moscow on 21 January, Deputy Interior Minister Aleksandr Chekalin declared, "the problem of the Meskhetian Turks is closed, and no longer exists since the new law on citizenship for the Russian Federation was passed," Interfax reported.

JAVAKHK / DJAVAKHK

01/05/04 - Ethnic Armenians trust likely president-elect Saakashvili - Kavkasia-Press news agency

An unprecedented turnout has been recorded during the 4 January presidential elections in the Samtskhe-Javakheti province largely populated with ethnic Armenians. The chairman of the

Akhalkalaki District Council, Artur Eremyan, told journalists that the turnout figure reached 80 per cent in the district, that is to say, it more than doubled compared with the turnout at the 2 November parliamentary elections. Passage omitted. Further comparison between the two elections. The majority of the voters voted for Mikheil Saakashvili, Eremyan said. He said that voters spoke openly about their sympathies towards Saakashvili. "The ethnic Armenia population of Javakhs the Armenian name for the region pins its hopes on him although Saakashvili' election manifesto did not include points concerning Javakhs problems, like the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks in the area, terms and conditions for the pull-out of the Russian military base or ways to improve the social conditions of the ethnic Armenian residents of the region," Eremyan said.

"The pro-Western course of the new Georgian authorities notwithstanding, the population of Javakhs is confident that the issue of the pull-out of the Russian military base situated in Akhalkalaki will not be put on the agenda in the near future. The acting president of Georgia, Nino Burjanadze, has more than once said that until the authorities have ensured the security and employment of the ethnic Armenian population of the region, a pull-out cannot be considered," Eremyan said.

01/12/04 – Rating of Sahakashvili increased in Javakhs 100 times within 60 days - PanArmenian News

[...] The absolute majority of the Georgian Armenians have really voted for Sahakashvili. But if we compare the results of voting with the results of the Parliamentary elections taken place in November, we can see that on January 4 Sahakashvili got 100 times more votes in the Armenian-populated regions than on November 2. Sahakashvili's party failed in Javakhs having got less than 1%. At the same time, during the Presidential elections, he got about 97% of the votes of the inhabitants of the regions populated with Armenians. On November 2 the majority of Armenians voted for the authorities, Eduard Shevardnadze and Aslan Abashidze, while two

month later they give their almost unanimous vote to the oppositional leader.

At a first sight it is a paradox. In reality the reason is rather trivial: the inhabitants of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda regions populated with Armenians, have always been loyal towards any authority. While the Armenians of Tbilisi are pluralistic, the inhabitants of Javakhs have never been so. They are always trying to demonstrate their loyalty to the authorities because they are unprotected. They are afraid that in case of an insufficient loyalty the anti-Armenian moods will strengthen. Once Sahakashvili told the journalists that he was worried by the unanimity of electors that reminded the years when the candidates were getting 99,99% of votes. The difference in the results of Presidential and Parliamentary elections in Javakhs, should also make the newly elected President think.

01/16/04 – Javakhs : alone against Georgian nationalism ? - AZG Daily

Russia gives up position in South Caucasus for \$500 million. In recent years Russia repeatedly proves that it is able to get humiliated in the Caucasus and other regions, which have traditionally been considered as zones of Russia's vital interest. Georgian foreign minister Tedi Djaparidze, returning from his recent visit to Moscow, told Georgian 'Imedi' TV channel that 'Russians demand 500 million USD to accelerate their military withdrawal from Georgia.'

It was at the notorious Istanbul OSCE summit, where Russia had pledged to start negotiations with official Tbilisi on withdrawing its military bases from Akhalkalaki and Batumi. Moscow had afterwards stressed several times that military bases ## 62 and 12 will require twelve years for complete dismantling, whereas Tbilisi finds the same process is possible in three years.

The Istanbul-held summit doesn't contain any documents 'forcing' Russian military leave Georgia at any concrete time. Moreover, Russia could bargain with the Georgian side as long as it wanted and postpone the withdrawal of military bases for quite a long time. Surprisingly, though, Moscow

seems ready to withdraw its military from Akhalkalaki and Batumi bases, putting forward only one precondition, that being an estimated 500 million USD financing of a quick pull out! If Georgia finds 500 million USD for these expenditures, Russia will pull out its military. That is, Russia sells its influence in South Caucasus for couple of hundred million bucks. Naturally the USA, which has been struggling to further its influence in the region for the last decade, hastened to declare that it is ready to render financial support to the Georgian side. The deputy aide to US Secretary of State Lynn Pasco has pledged to help Georgia, not elaborating the exact amount of money Washington intends to allocate. This is not as important, though. Important is that Russia loses power in South Caucasus.

'Javakhs-Armenians negatively refer to similar declarations from Russian side. How can Russians leave Akhalkalaki? The Javakhs - Armenians will do everything not to let this happen',- said the chairman of the Akhalkalaki-based 'Virk' Armenian party Davit Rstakian. 'If Russia intends not to leave Akhalkalaki's 62-nd military base, and needs our help, we will do everything so that Russian troops stay here',- added Rstakian.

The 62-nd Russian military base secures 2,000 Javakhs-Armenians with jobs, and also serves as a consumer market for the local villagers' agricultural products. Apart from the financial factor, though, important is the psychological one: several generations of Javakhs-Armenians have referred to Russian soldiers as the main guarantee of their security. In case Russians leave Akhalkalaki, Javakhs-Armenians will remain t3te-Ô-t3te with Georgian nationalism, and will have no other option but to leave the region or assimilate in course of time. At least a part of Georgian-Armenians left the country during the reign of former president Eduard Shevardnadze, so there is a worrisome trend.

Moreover, the social-economic development programs of Javakhs, earlier elaborated in Tbilisi, have remained on the paper, money shortage presented as excuse. If Georgian current authorities find finances to push Russians out from the country than they could as well

find finances to take care of Javakhhk's social problems, be there a will. Anyway, Georgian new authorities headed by Saakashvili have had time to pledge seeking ways to resolve Javakhhk's problems. Meanwhile, though, the Javakhhk-Armenians forget that the only true guarantee of their security is neither the old Russian military equipment and Russian soldiers, nor the Georgian leaders' promises, but strong Armenian-Georgian interstate relations. For otherwise Armenia will have to close the only non-Turkic window connecting Armenia with the outer world. And let Russia continue getting humiliated in the Caucasus front: it is not the important thing in this matter.

By Tatoul Hagopian

01/19/04 - Georgia's ethnic Armenians urge president-elect to give region autonomous status - Arminfo

Several Armenian public organizations in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti Region [densely-populated by Armenians] have issued a joint statement asking Georgian President-elect Mikheil Saakashvili for an autonomy status for the region and a more exact determination of its administrative borders. Citing the statement, Arminfo news agency reported that the current administrative-territorial borders and administrative structure of the region were not in the interest of its residents and do not take into account the region's specification. According to the statement, no social and economic programmes are being implemented in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region and the level of poverty is reaching a threatening level. The authors of the statement urged the president to take effective measures to integrate the region into the political, socio-economic and cultural life of the country that will contribute to Georgia's economic development and preserve its territorial integrity.

01/20/04 - Russian officers of Armenian origin will no longer serve at military base in Samtskhe-Javakhetia - Arminfo News

The Russian officers of Armenian origin doing their service at the 62nd military base dislocated on Samtskhe-Javakhetia region, Georgia, applied to the Command of the base for continuing their service at the military bases in the territory of Russia. Reliable sources told A-INFO, that their application was necessitated by the demand of the Staff of the South Caucasus District of the Russian Armed Force. According to the source, the Russian officers of Armenian origin will serve at the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki soon.

01/29/04 - Javakhhk wants autonomy ? - AZG Armenian Daily

The council of Armenian NGOs of Armenian populated Georgian Javakhhk region has condemned the Georgian parliament member of Armenian origin Van Baiburtian who had earlier stated to press that the majority of Javakhhk Armenians do not demand autonomy.

'Mr. Baiburtian who sits in Tbilisi is not well aware of what is going on in Samtskhe-Javakhhk and what the people want. The ignorance of Baiburtian proves that Javakhhk fell out from the circle of Georgian state governance. Georgian Times and other papers can send journalists to inquire from common people what they really think',- reads the condemnation statement.

Earlier last month, and then January 16 the members of the Armenian NGOs have submitted a bid to Nino Burdjanadze and Michael Saakashvili stressing the necessity of giving autonomy to Javakhhk.

Whereas Mr. Baiburtian told daily Azg that 'these organizations do not express the opinion of people, but only have leaders (who express their own views)'. 'The majority of Javakhhk Armenians do not talk about autonomy, realizing how it is accepted in Tbilisi, and that it will not do any good to Georgian-Armenian relations. Instead the issue of expanding the authority of local self-management bodies should be discussed',- said Baiburtian. 'I don't want to tell who

stands behind the organizations that talk about autonomy, but who have no people standing behind them for sure',- added the Georgian-Armenian lawmaker.

01/30/04 - Georgian parliament member Baiburdian's comments draw criticism - YERKIR weekly online

The Council of the Armenian non-governmental organizations of Samtskhe-Javakhhk condemned Van Baiburdian, an ethnic Armenian member of the Georgian parliament, who had commented over the Council's appeal to the Georgian president. Baiburdian has told the Georgian Times that those NGO's reflect the opinion of a fraction of the Javakhhk Armenians, and that the majority did not want autonomy. In this respect, the Council informs that the appeal to the president comes from the heart of every Armenian, and the request for autonomous status is driven by the desire to see a developed Samtskhe-Javakhhk and powerful Georgia. "As for Baiburdian's opinion, it should be said that sitting in Tbilisi, Mr. Baiburdian is not fully aware what is actually going on in Samtskhe-Javakhhk and what people want. Baiburdian's unawareness comes to prove our statement that the Samtskhe-Javakheti region has been left out of the governing process of Georgia. The Georgian Times and other papers can come to the region and find out directly from the people their opinions," a spokesman for the Council said.

02/23/04 - New governor of southern Georgian province appointed - Imedi TV

The southern Georgian province of Samtskhe-Javakheti largely populated with ethnic Armenians has a new governor Georgian president's representative in the region. President Mikheil Saakashvili has appointed Nikoloz Nikolozishvili, Georgia's former ambassador to Armenia, to this post. The former governor Nugzar Parunashvili has preferred a parliamentary seat. Parunashvili was elected parliament member from the Akhaltsikhe constituency in by-election on 4 January 2004.

02/27/04 - Armenians in Georgian Region Fear Repercussions of Corruption Crackdown - Armenpress

The crackdown on corruption, recently declared by the new Georgian authorities, has raised concern among the ethnic Armenians population of Javakhs who fear that innocent people who used to work for the previous administration, may fall victim to the campaign. Chairman of the Akhalkalak-based Virk party David Rstakian, was quoted by the local news media as saying that local Armenians who are already in a dire situation, now face another problem. Rstakian argued that a few instances of graft reported in the region were insubstantial, given the lack of money circulating in the area. "Corruption is flourishing in Tbilisi, where authorities receive millions of dollars in aid, but invest not a single dollar in the region," he said.

DOCUMENTS

02/06/04 - Armenia : Some 65,000 refugees from Azerbaijan gain Armenian citizenship - UNHCR News Stories

In one of the largest naturalizations of refugees in recent decades, the number of refugees from Azerbaijan obtaining Armenian citizenship topped 65,000 by the end of January, 2004, the UN refugee agency reported today. Fuente: UNHCR The naturalized refugees were among the 360,000 ethnic Armenians who arrived in Armenia from Azerbaijan from 1988 to 1993 as a result of the conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. With no resolution in sight for the Nagorno-Karabakh situation, the government and UNHCR have focused on helping refugees integrate locally in Armenia. Naturalization became an option for the refugees in 1995 with the enactment of a citizenship law which included special provisions to make naturalization much easier for refugees from Azerbaijan. UNHCR supported the process with financial

and material assistance to regional government offices to help with administration and paperwork. At first, relatively low numbers of refugees came forward, in part due to a lack of awareness of the right to naturalize and of the necessary procedures. Over the first four years of the programme, a total of 7,400 naturalized. In 1999, UNHCR began an information campaign in conjunction with the government to better inform refugees of this option. In part thanks to this campaign, the numbers shot upwards, with nearly 8,000 naturalizing in 1999 alone. Another incentive for naturalization came after July 2000, as former Soviet passports could no longer be used for travel outside of Armenia. Citizenship allows refugees to obtain an Armenian passport. The numbers nearly doubled in 2000 with more than 15,600 naturalizations, followed by another 16,300 in 2001. More than 17,400 others naturalized over the next two years, and the more than 300 new citizens in January, 2004 pushed the total to over 65,000 since 1995.

Besides access to an Armenian passport, naturalization brings a number of additional rights to the refugees, including the right to vote in national elections and the right to own land. However, even without naturalizing, refugees in Armenia have extensive legal rights nearly on par with citizens. In Armenia, naturalization is an individual and voluntary choice. Refugees have to pro-actively request naturalization, rather than receiving it automatically or as a group. Some factors that have inhibited refugees from naturalizing are fear of losing refugee assistance and benefits, including compensation for their losses in Azerbaijan in the event of a peace agreement, and worries about compulsory military service for young men of draft age. Some refugees point out that naturalization itself does not directly improve their living conditions, which is a more pressing concern for refugees who are among the poorest of the poor in Armenia. Yet despite these concerns, the number of naturalized refugees has grown steadily. "Our main goal is to make sure that refugees have access to a fair and effective naturalization process and can make a free and informed decision about naturalization. It is not just about the quantity of

naturalizations, but the quality of the process as well," said Lloyd Dakin, UNHCR's representative in Armenia. "However, while we do not measure success in Armenia solely by the numbers who naturalize, the extent of naturalization in Armenia is impressive and shows that the process is working well." The Armenian voluntary naturalization is among the largest ever for a specific refugee group. In the past decade, over 8,000 Guatemalans have naturalized in Mexico, and in 1980, 36,000 Rwandan refugees voluntarily acquired Tanzanian citizenship.

In industrialized countries, people granted asylum often have the right to naturalize after a number of years. However, as governmental statistics do not generally reflect whether someone naturalizing originally entered the country as a refugee or gained asylum, it is difficult to gauge the extent of refugee naturalizations in industrialized nations.

"Naturalization and local integration are not very often available as a durable solution for refugees worldwide," concluded Dakin. "But in Armenia it has been happening on a large scale for some time. This is an impressive achievement reflecting the government's generosity towards refugees, and it deserves recognition."

02/10/04 - Azerbaijan's geopolitical intentions subject of increasing speculation - Eurasianet Organization

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's recent visit to Moscow was marked by speculation surrounding Baku's geopolitical intentions. For the time being, Ilham Aliyev appears intent on maintaining the so-called "balanced" foreign policy approach instituted by his father, Heidar. Many political analysts believe, however, that Azerbaijan will sooner or later be forced to choose between Russia and the West.

Aliyev, who succeeded his father as Azerbaijani leader last October, met with top Russian leaders, including President Vladimir Putin, during his February 6-8 trip to Russia. At the conclusion of talks, the two presidents signed a declaration reaffirming a 1997 Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, as well as the Baku Declaration on Principles of Security and Cooperation in the

Caucasus signed during Putin's visit to Baku in January 2001. The so called Moscow declaration "stipulates that the two countries will join efforts to support each other's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity," according to a report broadcast by ANS television in Baku. Upon his return to Baku, Aliyev said that Azerbaijan, in signing the declaration, also signaled its intent to continue oil exports via a Russia's Novorossiisk pipeline, the Interfax news agency reported. In recent years, Azerbaijan under the Aliyevs has managed a delicate balancing act, in which Baku has cultivated close relations with both the United States and Russia. Close cooperation with the West was seen as essential for the development of Azerbaijan's energy potential, including construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive]. Meanwhile, Russian assistance was seen as critical to the country's stability. [For additional information see the Eurasia Insight archive].

Outside developments -- including the September 11 terrorist tragedy and the US-led invasion of Iraq have prompted an increase in geopolitical maneuvering in the Caucasus, thus making it increasingly difficult for Azerbaijan to steer a middle course between the United States and Russia.

The signing of the Moscow declaration set off alarm bells among Azerbaijani opposition supporters, who expressed concern that Aliyev was prepared to move away from the United States and the European Union and steer Baku back into Russia's orbit. A report published in the Azerbaijani opposition newspaper *Yeni Musavat* accused Aliyev of "selling out our national interest." The February 8 article went on to quote political Xaqani Huseynli as saying; "This [the declaration] means that Azerbaijan is turning into Russia's satellite." Many Russian commentators saw the visit from a decidedly different perspective. From Moscow's viewpoint, the Kremlin's chief goal during the visit was to keep Aliyev from drifting completely into the US sphere of influence. Russian leaders sought to convince Aliyev that only the preservation of a balanced foreign-policy course "corresponds to the

national interests of both Russia and Azerbaijan," political analyst Pavel Belov wrote in a commentary published in the *Kommersant* daily. Russian concerns about its geopolitical position in the Caucasus have risen in recent months, driven in large measure by the coming to power of an ardently pro-Western government in Georgia. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive]. Russian leaders have also been unsettled by speculation that the United States wants to establish a military base in Azerbaijan. US officials have denied harboring plans for build an Azerbaijani base. In Moscow, Aliyev went to great lengths to reassure his hosts that Baku remains committed to a balanced foreign policy. Shortly before the visit, Aliyev gave a wide-ranging interview to the Russian daily *Izvestiya*, in which he downplayed the possibility of Azerbaijan joining Western institutions, including NATO and the EU. "This is a matter for the future," Aliyev said of NATO membership. This decision needs to be carefully weighed and the most effective options elaborated. Since there have been no serious discussions on this score so far, talking about this is premature." Aliyev also praised Baku's ties to Moscow. "The level of our relations is very high," Aliyev said in the February 4 interview. "Russia is a strategic

partner for us." In a parallel interview with the Russian daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Aliyev's foreign policy aide, Novruz Mamedov, specifically sought to quash speculation about a US base in Azerbaijan. "Whatever is being said to this effect, all fears [concerning a base] are groundless," Mamedov said adding that "we won't make a single move that may damage someone else's interests." While the two sides seemed generally satisfied with the visit, both did not get all that they were seeking. The widely held belief in Azerbaijani policy-making circles was that Russia was not prepared to do much to break the existing stalemate in Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks. [For background see the Eurasia Insight archive]. Russian officials, meanwhile, remain concerned about Baku's commitment to ship its oil via the Novorossiisk pipeline, fearing that Aliyev will abandon the pledge

made in the Moscow declaration once the BTC pipeline becomes operational. Most Russian experts seem to agree that, at some point, Azerbaijan will have to make a choice between Russia and the West. But they are divided over what the Azerbaijan's ultimate geopolitical choice will be. One group of Russian analysts believe that, in the long run, Azerbaijan will remain within Russia's strategic orbit. Pointing out that Russia is Azerbaijan's largest economic partner, regional analyst Dmitry Orlov wrote in a commentary published in the *Vremya Novosti* daily, that Azerbaijan will not be able "to part ways" with Moscow since both countries share "a common geopolitical, economic and cultural space." Other experts, including Moscow Carnegie Center researcher Alexei Malashenko, say Baku's main strategic orientation will ultimately be "pro-Western, pro-American, and pro-Turkish." At the same time, Malashenko says, "Ilham will do everything possible to keep good relations with Russia." Azerbaijani observers also acknowledge the geopolitical dilemma facing the Aliyev administration. On February 7, for example, the *Zerkalo.az* web site posted a commentary entitled "Azerbaijan at the Crossroads: Eurasianism or Euro-Atlantism?" The article went on to say that Aliyev was undecided on what to do. "Azerbaijan is really experiencing difficulty on the question of choosing its geopolitical direction," it said.

Editor's Note: Igor Torbakov is a freelance journalist and researcher who specializes in CIS political affairs. He holds an MA in History from Moscow State University and a PhD from the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. He was Research Scholar at the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow; a Visiting Scholar at the Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC; a Fulbright Scholar at Columbia University, New York; and a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University. He is now based in Istanbul, Turkey.