

Covcas Bulletin

Conflits et Droits de l'Homme au Caucase
Publication mensuelle bilingue (Anglais/Français)
Conflicts & Human Rights in the Caucasus
A monthly and bilingual (English/French) publication

CONTENTS / SOMMAIRE	SUMMARY NOTES	
p 1 Summary notes	ARMENIA	Government supporters have proposed that the president appoint 9 of the 11 members of the Central Election Commission (CEC); and/or, that only parties that had garnered more than 7% of vote during the 1999 elections be represented on the CEC. Opposition groups have stridently criticized both options.
p 1-2 Résumés	Irregularities and breaches seen during the February and March, 2003 presidential elections were largely repeated in the May 25th parliamentary elections. Prior to both elections, international election monitoring organizations expressed concern about electioneering efforts by participating political parties in the days leading up to the vote. The OSCE and Council of Europe concluded that the irregularities and fraud were not the result of technical difficulties but the lack of political will to carry out free and fair elections. While other election observers did cite improvements in the Parliamentary election, they noted that the vote fell short of international standards.	The debate on amendments to the election law has been unproductive. According to one option proposed by the government, CEC members would be appointed by a majority of current parliament members while another option proposed by opposition groups would have political parties appoint CEC members. Five opposition parties -- including the National Movement, United Democrats, New Right, Traditionalists Union and the Georgian People's Party -- organized the June 3 rd demonstration in front of the Parliament, which attracted several thousand people and called for the resignation of the current CEC.
p 2-22 Developping events Revue de presse :	Not surprisingly, parties aligned with the ruling regime emerged victorious in the elections, allowing for the creation of a coalition government, with the Republican Party taking on six ministries, and the Orinats Yerkir and Armenian Revolutionary Federation taking on three ministries each. The ministries of Defense, Foreign Affairs and Interior remained outside of the coalition agreement, with the Ministers appointed by President Kocharian.	RESUMES
p 2-6 Azerbaijan Azerbaidjan	GEORGIA	ARMENIE
p 6-11 Armenia Arménie	Just six months prior to the parliamentary elections, election laws have become the subject of discord between the Georgian ruling parties and opposition.	Les élections législatives du 25 mai dernier ont répété dans l'ensemble les défauts et manquements des élections présidentielles en février et mars 2003. Le verdict des organisations internationales qui ont assuré des missions d'observation dans les deux cas avait tiré la sonnette d'alarme dans la période qui a précédé le scrutin législatif demandant un réajustement des comportements des partis en lisse. Les conclusions de l'OSCE et du Conseil de l'Europe ont souligné le
p 11-14 Georgia Georgie		
p 15 Daghestan Daghestan		
p 15-17 Abkhazia Abkhazie		
p 17 North Ossetia Ossetie du Nord		
p 17-18 South Ossetia Ossetie du Sud		
p 18-20 Chechnya Tchetchénie		
p 20 South Russia Russie du sud		
p 20-22 Nagorno Karabakh Haut Karabagh		
p 22 Ingushetia Ingouchie		
p 22 Javakhk Djavakhk		
p 22-23 Documents		
p 23 Information		

fait que les fraudes et irrégularités ne sont pas dues à des problèmes techniques mais à l'absence d'une volonté des autorités de procéder à des élections justes et libres. D'autres observateurs ont déclaré que des améliorations par rapport à l'élection présidentielle étaient visibles mais les performances restaient bien de deçà des standards requis par la communauté internationale.

La victoire, sans surprise, des partis proches du pouvoir en place a permis la création d'un gouvernement de coalition où le Parti Républicain garde 6, et " Orinats Yerkir " et la Fédération Révolutionnaire Arménienne " Dashnaktsutun " 3 portefeuilles chacun. Les ministères clés de la Défense, des Affaires Etrangères et de l'Intérieur restent en dehors de l'accord de Coalition et leur ministres étaient nommés par le Président Kotcharian lui même.

GEORGIE

A six mois des élections parlementaires la loi électorale a été l'objet de discorde entre le pouvoir et l'opposition géorgiens; les projets du gouvernement proposant que 9 des 11 membres de la Commission Electorale Centrale soient nommés par le président, ou encore, que seuls les partis qui avaient récolté plus de 7 % des votes lors des élections de 1999 soient représentés à la CEC se sont heurtés à une vive opposition de la part des formations adverses.

Le débat sur les amendements de la loi n'ont pas abouti. L'un présenté par le gouvernement proposait que ce soit la majorité actuelle qui désigne les membres de la CEC, l'opposition, quant à elle, demandait que les partis politiques en désignent les membres. Cinq partis d'opposition, le Mouvement National, Les Démocrates Unis, La nouvelle Droite, l'union des traditionalistes, et le parti du peuple de Géorgie ont appelé à une manifestation le 3 juin devant le Parlement qui a réuni plusieurs milliers de personnes, demandant la démission de l'actuelle CEC.

**DEVELOPPING EVENTS /
REVUE DE PRESSE**

AZERBAIJAN / AZERBAIDJAN

05/02/03 – Member of coordination Council of Caucasian Forum NGO calls indignant Azeri human rights activist's persecution - Arminfo

In her interview to the Karabakh Radio, the member of the Caucasian Forum NGO Irina Grigoryan called indignant the persecution of the Azeri human rights activist Eldar Zeynalov, who has recently participated in a regional seminar of NGOs in Stepanakert.

According to ARMINFO's special correspondent to Stepanakert, in her interview, Irina Grigoryan said that all the members of the Karabakh NGOs and, in particular, of the Caucasian Forum, are deeply concerned about this fact. The negative attitude to Eldar Zeynalov of several governmental organizations and even non-governmental circles of Azerbaijan is not a news. Zeynalov's approach to such normal things as human factor and normal human relations are misinterpreted in Azerbaijan. This persecution was expected, but not in such scales. We worry about our colleague with whom we try to develop the civil principles in different regions of the Caucasus. The democratic forces of Azerbaijan should make the right decision and support their colleague, Grigoryan said.

05/05/03 – Presidential amnesty for Azerbaijani prisoners submitted to parliament - RFE/RL

President Aliyev on 3 May submitted a general amnesty to parliament for several thousand prisoners, ANS reported. The new amnesty would release nearly 9,000 inmates and reduce the sentences for another 2,200 convicts. The draft amnesty, which requires parliamentary approval, specifies several preconditions for eligibility, all of which mandate that beneficiaries either be veterans, elderly, or have committed crimes as minors.

05/07/03 – Pace official calls for release of 10 alleged Azerbaijani political prisoners - RFE/RL

A leading member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the

Council of Europe (PACE), Georges Clerfayt, urged the Azerbaijani authorities on 6 May to release a group of 10 alleged political prisoners, Interfax and ANS reported. The Azerbaijani government denies that any of the 10 are actually political prisoners. Clerfayt studied a list of more than 300 detainees identified by Azerbaijani human rights groups as political prisoners and selected 10 cases in which to intervene. The group includes former Defense Minister Rakhim Gaziev and former Interior Minister Iskander Hamidov. Clerfayt was dispatched to Azerbaijan to inspect prison facilities and living conditions for political prisoners. Azerbaijan is formally committed, under the terms of its Council of Europe membership, to release any detainees judged the council to be political prisoners.

05/07/03 – Aliyev's health problems create political uncertainty in Azerbaijan – Caucasus analyst – Azer Mamedov

(.../...)

Aliyev's recent health problems have already become Azerbaijan's problems. The illness of the sole decision-maker has put the political and economic development of the country on hold, leading to stagnation in many sectors of economy. There have been rumors of foreign companies pulling out their financial resources from the country.(.../...)

Although it may be premature to foresee the President's demise and speculate of the consequences of this event, some implications of the collapse are already emerging. The most palpable consequence has been an acceleration of latent political processes. Internal struggles within the ruling party have begun to intensify, raising the possibility of a split between forces presently united mainly by vested interests in staying in power. At the same time, opposition parties have jumpstarted their race for power, thus creating a real danger for increased political instability in the country. The last two weeks have highlighted the risks of relying on one person as the guarantor of stability both in Azerbaijan and in general. Two specific issues are presently worth watching: one is the role of foreign powers, especially Russia and Iran, who may attempt

to influence these processes by supporting their own candidates; the other is whether the Karabakh issue will be an element in the power struggle, and whether this will increase regional tensions.

05/09/03 - Editors Condemn Newspaper Attack - RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report

On 4 May at 9.30 p.m. about 20-30 people, led by Faramaz Allahverdiev, burst into the editorial office of the opposition newspaper "Yeni Musavat." Allahverdiev is one of the former activists of the Popular Front Party and a former chairman of the Sharur district's Council of People's Deputies. He was once one of Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliiev's agitators.

Recently Allahverdiev has got himself noticed because of his sharp criticism of opposition Musavat Party chairman Isa Gambar and Mirmahmud Miralioglu, head of the "conservative faction" within the People's Front Party. Gabil Abbasoglu, the newspaper's deputy editor in chief, who was a witness of the incident, told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani service that the assailants were looking for him and the newspaper's editor in chief Rauf Arifoglu. Another witness Elshad Pashasoi said that the attackers insulted and beat him, Abbasoglu, and another man. After 20-30 minutes the attackers were detained by the police.

In an interview with RFE/RL's Azerbaijani service Rauf Arifoglu said that the editorial staff was aware of the possibility of an attack some days before and Interior Minister Ramil Usubov and the Sabail Police Department were informed. In response to their appeal, the police department stationed an officer in front of the editorial office. But some hours prior to the incident the officer had left his post. According to preliminary data, there was \$3,000 worth of damage at the newspaper, Arifoglu said.

But Nazim Nagiev, head of the Sabail Police Department, told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani service that the incident must not be exaggerated. A number of people simply tried to protest and were prevented and four of them were detained, he said.

The Editors Union held an extraordinary meeting on the incident. Arif Aliiev, chairman of the New Generation Journalists Union, said that the participants of the

meeting categorically condemned the assault, calling it a step directed against the freedom of the press and speech. Aliiev noted that the union will hold a protest on 12 May. Peter Burkhard, head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Baku Office, who visited the editorial office, called the assault an attack against free media and freedom of speech. U.S. Embassy officials also visited the office, but refused to comment on the situation.

05/13/03 - Azerbaijani journalists protest restrictions on sale of opposition publications - RFE/RL Newsline

Meeting in Baku on 12 May, the Council of Editors expressed its support for the planned picket of the Baku municipal administration to protest restrictions on the sale in the city of opposition publications, Turan reported. The Committee for the Rights of Journalists had adopted a statement on 6 May calling on the authorities to revoke the ban imposed on 5 May on the sale of opposition newspapers at metro stations and the total ban on sales of "Yeni Musavat," "Azadlig" and "Hurriyet." According to the Council of Editors, that ban was ordered by presidential administration head Ramiz Mekhtiev.

05/15/03 - Treason trial opens against former Azerbaijani prisoner of war - Associated Press Worldstream

A treason trial opened Thursday against a former Azerbaijani prisoner of war who is accused of collaborating with his ethnic Armenian captors and abusing his compatriots in custody.

Nadir Mahmudov was taken prisoner by ethnic Armenian separatists in the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave in October 1993, and was held for more than two years in a makeshift prison in a pediatric hospital in the village of Khankendi. Prosecutors say he was appointed an overseer for his fellow prisoners and that he took part in torturing and humiliating them.

They also accuse Mahmudov of providing information to ethnic Armenian security and intelligence officials. He faces a sentence of 10 years to life in prison if convicted.(...)

05/19/03 - Azerbaijani opposition stages protest demonstration - RFE/RL Newsline

Some 25,000 people attended a rally in Baku on 18 May organized by the nine opposition parties aligned in the Opposition Coordinating Center(...). Participants in the rally, which took place with the permission of the municipal administration, demanded President Aliiev's resignation and measures to ensure that the presidential election due in October is free and fair.

05/19/03 - IMF releases new loan tranche for Azerbaijan - RFE/RL Newsline

On completing its second review of Azerbaijan's economic performance under a three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) program, the IMF's executive board approved the release of a further loan instalment worth approximately \$18 million, according to an IMF press release dated 15 May. The press release noted that the money was disbursed despite Baku's failure to meet certain key IMF conditions, including raising domestic prices for oil and gas to world market levels, privatizing the state-owned International Bank, and granting quarterly tax credits to the state oil company SOCAR. The IMF board extended until 31 March 2005 the three-year PRGF program, which was initially approved in July 2001. Acting IMF Chairman Eduardo Aninat noted that Azerbaijan has experienced strong economic growth in recent years, but warned that the country's economy is heavily weighted toward the oil sector and that poverty remains widespread.

05/21/03 - Intellectuals Discuss Fallout of Authoritarian Regime - RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report

Intellectuals, political leaders, and others gathered on 14 May to discuss how to avoid a brewing political power crisis.

The theoretical and practical conference brought together prominent professors and heads of human rights and political organizations to discuss the current social and political situation in the country. Saleh Memmedov, a former finance minister, noted that during the 10 years of President Aliiev's

government an "authoritarian regime" has been established in Azerbaijan. Given such a regime, now that the president is ill, people at all levels who normally await orders from above are now in a position of some difficulty and a power crisis has ripened.

Memmedov noted that at present the Azerbaijani public has been divided on a class, societal, and ideological basis and turned into forces that do not accept each other. It cannot be ruled out that if the president remains unable to fulfill his duties for some reason or another, these forces could collide.

Leila Yunus, director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, noted that some steps must be made to avert a power crisis. She said that Azerbaijani intellectuals and active political groups should appeal to law enforcement bodies, calling on them to think carefully about future decisions. Moreover, groups must also be alert to any possible violation of the cease-fire at the front and take measures to prevent it. Representatives of political parties and intellectuals emphasized that under existing conditions the opposition forces must put up a united front.

A resolution adopted at the end of the meeting suggests that considering the conflicting intransigence in the country, opposition forces and the government must sign an agreement, determining both sides' duties and responsibilities. Control over the implementation of the agreement is to be entrusted to a monitoring group, composed of representatives from the Council of Europe, OSCE, UN, and the U.S. Embassy. Moreover, considering the president's health problems, the participants at the conference called for the president's resignation and the holding extraordinary presidential elections, as well as the inclusion of international institutions' representatives in the Central Election Commission.

The meeting's participants suggested creating a public monitoring committee with participation of elders, well-known intellectuals, and specialists in order to assess the government's work.

The resolution proposes to appeal to the Gulhane Military Hospital on behalf of the conference's participants for information about the president's health and his ability to work.

05/27/03 - Australians advised not to travel Azerbaijan - paper Azadliq

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has urged Australian citizens not to travel to Azerbaijan. The department circulated a statement yesterday [26 May] which said that the threat of terror is still hanging over foreign citizens in Azerbaijan and serious crimes are being committed in this Caucasus country. From this viewpoint, travel to Baku can lead to undesirable consequences for Australian citizens. Australia joined Britain in putting Azerbaijan on its list of dangerous countries for travel. In a statement the British government said that Azerbaijan's Karabakh region was beyond control and travel to numerous districts, for instance Zaqatala [northern Azerbaijan], was dangerous for foreigners. One can understand London's anxiety over Karabakh especially as the Azerbaijani government is also complaining about a lack of control over this region. But the fact that the British government called on its citizens not to visit other districts of Azerbaijan as well cannot but escape our attention.

Thus, the number of countries, which have put Azerbaijan on their list of dangerous countries, is on the rise. The Canadian government also urged its citizens to exercise caution during their "visits to Baku". All this shows that our country is now being perceived differently abroad. Citizens of several developed countries are not travelling to Baku even for business reasons.

05/28/03 - Azerbaijan's police threatened with dismissal for unwarranted violence - RFE/RL Newsline

Interior Minister Ramil Usubov told an emergency session of ministry staff on 27 May that any police officers who in future resort to unwarranted physical violence against members of the public will be dismissed without warning, Turan reported. Also on 27 May, Nazim Nagiev, who heads the police department in Baku's Sabayil Raion, admitted that his men took some passers-by into custody while forcibly dispersing members of the opposition Azerbaijan Popular Front Party who were picketing the parliament building on 27 May to protest Abiev's insulting (...). A total

of 37 people were apprehended, of whom 10 were subsequently released.

05/30/03 - Journalists Meet Over Violence by Police - RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report

On 24 May the Sabail police department of Baku used physical force against some journalists in front of the office of the opposition newspaper "Azadliq," according to Azer Hasret, chairman of Azerbaijani Journalists Confederation. Hasret told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani service that journalists were exposed to physical force as well during a 25 May unsanctioned protest held by the Democratic Party (ADP). He noted that only one of them was identified to date. He is from the opposition newspaper "Hurriyyet."

Hasret noted that the issue of journalists being beaten was discussed at a 27 May meeting of the Editors Union. "First of all, we will appeal to the country's leadership and law-enforcement bodies. At the same time we agreed to resume the meeting committee of journalists and to finish current pickets with a mass meeting." Ehsan Geribov of the Internal Ministry's press service told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service that the ministry was unaware of the recent incident with journalists, adding that it could investigate the matter after an official appeal.

06/06/03 - Europe's Human Rights Court to Hear Azerbaijani Cases - RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report

From the end of June the Council of Europe's Human Rights Court will begin to look at Azerbaijani citizens' complaints, said Hajimurad Sadeddinov, head of the Fund for Democratic Development and Protection of Human Rights. Although citizens of Azerbaijan, a full member of the Council of Europe, have long ago won the right to appeal to the European Court, their complaints have not been considered because of the absence of an Azerbaijani judge and lawyer in this institution.

Sadeddinov told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani service that in June Khanlar Hajiev will take up the duties of Azerbaijani judge at the European Court. The European Court's representatives in Baku stated that they have no exact information about this, but

expressed assurance that Azerbaijani citizens' complaints would be considered in the near future.

Meanwhile, there is also no reliable information regarding the number of citizens who have appealed to the European Court. For example, according to the European Court only 140 of a total of 1,000 applicants have been accepted for processing. The Council of Europe's Representative Office in Baku told Olaylar news agency that 360 people have appealed to the European Court. Most of complaints are linked with violation of fair court law, and freedom of speech and assembly. But according to Sadeddinov's estimates, some 300 citizens have appealed to the European Court to date. Only 30 of them have been registered.

06/09/03 – Council of Europe criticizes Azerbaijan's failure to release political prisoners - RFE/RL Newsline

Azerbaijan was severely criticized at a session in Paris on 5 June of the Committee on Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Turan reported on 6 June. Among the criticisms contained in a draft report submitted to the committee by Belgian parliamentarian Georges Clerfayt were the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to act on their promises to implement democratic reforms and release political prisoners, the arrest of new political prisoners, and the delay in completion of the repeat trials of three men whom PACE considers political prisoners. At the insistence of the Azerbaijani representative, the draft was amended to remove direct criticism of President Heidar Aliyev's son Ilham, who heads Azerbaijan's PACE delegation, Turan reported.

06/09/03 – Azerbaijani opposition party nominates chairman as presidential candidate - RFE/RL Newsline

The more than 4,000 delegates to the eighth congress in Baku of the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (AMIP) on 8 June nominated party Chairman Etibar Mamedov as AMIP's candidate for the 17 October presidential election, Turan reported. Mamedov contested the presidency in 1993 and 1998, claiming on the latter occasion that

he polled over 35 percent of the vote, thus depriving Heidar Aliyev of a first-round victory. On 7 June, opposition Musavat Party leader Isa Gambar reaffirmed his support for fielding a single opposition candidate to challenge incumbent President Aliyev. Gambar suggested that candidates should be selected by means of U.S.-style primaries. Also on 7 June, Lala-Shovet Gadjeva resigned as chairwoman of the Liberal Party of Azerbaijan, which she founded in 1995, Turan reported. Gadjeva plans to run as an independent candidate in the 17 October ballot.

06/13/03 – "Azerbaijan-Turkey relations may suffer if wrong steps taken" Azerbaijani ambassador - Azerbaijan News Service ANS

Azerbaijan is concerned of secret negotiations started by Ankara with Armenian lobby in U.S. and Armenia to regulate relations with this country. Azerbaijan ambassador to Turkey Mammad Aliyev expressed anxiety of President of Republic of Azerbaijan concerning the issue. In his interview with Huriyyet newspaper the ambassador said If wrong steps taken in this field Azerbaijan and Turkey relations may suffer. On the other hand Union of Europe laid demand before Turkey to establish relations with Armenia as a prerequisite for admission to this organization. However Azerbaijani diplomat once more repeated 4 main demands by official Ankara after which the borders may be opened. That is Armenia must give up land claims toward Turkey and stop the campaign of the so called Armenian genocide. Armenia should release occupied territories of Azerbaijan and open a corridor between Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan. Blockade on Nakhchivan should be lifted. Otherwise there cannot be any talks on relations with Armenia or opening of borders. This position has been confirmed by President of Turkey and Prime Minister. Meanwhile foreign minister of Turkey Abdulla Gul affirmed at press conference in Ankara the negotiations with armenian representatives. But he didn't elaborate the concrete results of negotiations held by Ecvet Tezcan from Turkish side.

06/18/03 – Azerbaijani President pardons more prisoners - RFE/RL Newsline

Heidar Aliyev issued a decree on 17 June pardoning 97 prisoners and reducing by half the remaining sentence that nine more must serve, Turan reported.

Thirty-eight of those pardoned had been sentenced for crimes against the state, including involvement in an attempted coup d'etat in late 1994 and the March 1995 insurrection by special police. Human rights activist Hadjimurad Sadaddinov told Turan that two of the freed prisoners are included on the Council of Europe's list of persons considered political prisoners.

06/18/03 – Azerbaijani academic fired for criticizing President - RFE/RL Newsline

Ahad Ibrahimov, a professor at the Oil Academy, was dismissed from his post on 3 June for having appended his signature to a statement issued by the AMAL movement calling for President Aliyev to acknowledge the damage his "dictatorial regime" has inflicted on the country and resign.(...)

06/18/03 - Azerbaijani analyst critical of new USA appointment – Ekho

Ambassador Edward Jerejian, a citizen of the USA of Armenian origin, was appointed yesterday as chairman of a new commission which will advise the Bush administration on the issues of public diplomacy and programmes in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

At the start of the 1990s Washington was planning to appoint Jerejian as ambassador to the USSR. Baku protested against Jerejian's appointment at the time and due to that and to several other factors the USA decided not to appoint him. However the US Department of State said in a statement that Jerejian would now supervise Azerbaijan as a country, where the majority of the population professes Islam, as a country of the "Islamic world".

According to political analyst Vafa Quluzada, "the US administration now has a consultant who is not objective". The former state advisor said that "an Armenian is always an Armenian and Jerejian will not be

able to take an unbiased stance on the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict". Therefore "I would have preferred the ambassador to consult the administration on the problems of say Micronesia or Canada, but not on Azerbaijan".(...)

06/24/03 - The Plight of Refugees As a Propaganda Tool- The Moscow Times

Friday was World Refugee Day, though I shouldn't think any of the people who fled the war in Nagorny Karabakh and now live in rickety shacks, railway carriages and tiny mud huts were celebrating.

The UN refugee agency gave a concert and grand reception on Friday evening for government ministers and other bigwigs to highlight the plight of refugees in Azerbaijan. Per capita, Azerbaijan has one of the worst refugee problems in the world. There is a growing number from Chechnya, the Middle East and Afghanistan. But the bulk of them come from the 1988-94 Karabakh war.

About 800,000 Azeris and 200,000 Armenians were forced out of their homes during the conflict in Karabakh, which was part of Soviet Azerbaijan. Six years after the fighting began, the two sides signed a ceasefire, conceding Karabakh and six of the surrounding territories to Armenian control.

The Armenians who left have been housed in Armenia or moved to Russia. But in Azerbaijan, the situation has been very different. Almost half a million of those displaced by the war are still living in makeshift accommodation.

I've visited some of the places where refugees live. Electricity comes and goes, water supplies are sporadic and it's sweltering in the summer and dismally cold in the winter. Aid agencies have a hard time drumming up support for Azerbaijan's refugees: The war ended almost 10 years ago and they've been all but forgotten by the outside world. The government has started building new shelters for some of the refugees, but many say it's too little, too late.

"Azerbaijan hasn't succeeded in reviving its economy, and we are not yet in a position to solve the problems of all the displaced people," the head of the government's working committee on refugees, Qurban Sadygov, told journalists last week. Interesting, then, that the authorities could pay

for a facelift for Baku, including a spacious Philharmonic Hall, for the president's 80th birthday this year, but aren't able to ease the lives of hundreds of thousands of Azeris living in misery and squalor.

The fact is, Azerbaijan's refugees are a convenient propaganda tool for the government. Far better that they live in miserable conditions than integrate with the rest of the population. In any case, giving them permanent accommodation would mean admitting that Azerbaijan lost the war and that the refugees will never go home. I can't see the situation changing any time soon. I imagine next year's World Refugee Day, a decade after the end of hostilities, will see just as many refugees struggling to survive in the shadow of a war most people no longer remember.

06/24/03 - Heydar Aliyev Nominated For Third Presidential Term - Baku Today

Heydar Aliyev, Yeni Azerbaijan party's chairman, has been nominated yesterday for the third presidential term at the session of the party's Political Council.

Ali Akhmedov, party's executive secretary, said in his speech that "Azerbaijani people support Heydar Aliyev's policy and he is regarded as a leader by an absolute majority." Milli Mejlis speaker Murtuz Aleskerov, party's deputy chairman, has presented Heydar Aliyev's program. According to Turan news agency, he said Heydar Aliyev is a "symbol of independence" of Azerbaijan and Aliyev's return to Baku on June 15 must be celebrated as Independence Day. (...)

ARMENIA / ARMENIE

OSCE Final Report Published - Armenian NGO news in brief

"The 19 February and 5 March 2003 presidential election in the Republic of Armenia fell short of international standards for democratic elections. While the election involved a vigorous countrywide campaign, the overall process failed to provide equal conditions for the candidates. Voting, counting and tabulation showed serious irregularities, including widespread ballot box stuffing," says the final report of the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Observation Mission in Armenia.

Executive Summary

According to the OSCE observers, not only international standards were not met but also the Armenian Electoral Code was not implemented with sufficient political determination to meet OSCE commitments for democratic elections.

However, it provided a basis for the conduct of elections in compliance with international standards.

The report says that some opposition leaders made intemperate statements, including calls for unconstitutional action, although the opposition candidate in the second round called on his supporters to take only action in accordance with the law. Rallies and demonstrations remained largely peaceful.

Public TV and the major State-funded newspaper were heavily biased in favor of the incumbent, failing to comply with their legal obligation to provide balanced reporting on candidates or with OSCE commitments on equal access to the media. Independent television A1+ remained off the air throughout the election.

In general, the election administration completed efficiently the technical preparations for the election. The formula for appointing election commission members led to politically imbalanced commissions in which most opposition candidates had little confidence. The Central Election Commission (CEC) did not publish a prompt and detailed breakdown of preliminary results, contributing to further lack of confidence in the process. Despite useful efforts to improve the voter lists, they remained problematic.

The observers also referred to the hearings in the Constitutional Court, saying that two cases were brought to the Constitutional Court contesting separately the outcome of each round. The cases were heard and underwent rigorous, public and thorough examination by the Court. Neither complaint was upheld, although the Court confirmed that a number of serious electoral violations had taken place. The Court also made a number of recommendations for improved implementation of the legislative and administrative frameworks.

The failure of the 2003 presidential election to meet international standards lay not in technical or procedural lapses, but in a lack of sufficient political determination by the authorities to ensure a fair and honest process. Restoring confidence in the election process will require prompt and vigorous action by the authorities, including a clear assumption of responsibility and holding accountable those who violated the law, particularly those in official positions who did so.

05/06/03 - Council of Europe wants Armenia to fully abolish death penalty - AZG Armenian Daily

The new criminal code approved by Armenian parliament last April 17 abolished death penalty but the law on its enactment stipulates it for grave crimes, committed before the code's enactment.

'The Council of Europe finds that death penalty is de jure not eliminated in Armenia,' a special representative of the Council of Europe secretary general Natalia Vutova said to the daily Azg. She once again reminded the position of the Council of Europe on death penalty that 'the Council of Europe is a death penalty free zone.' 'We are doing everything possible to have all member countries to ratify Protocol 6 that abolishes unconditionally death penalty,' she said. Natalia Vutova said the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) will hear a report on the abolition of death penalty in Armenia in late June. 'Whether the Council of Europe will apply sanctions on Armenia or not depends completely on PACE delegates,' she said.

05/06/03 - Turkey Blocks Reference To Armenian Genocide On Israel Independence Day - AFP

Turkey has stepped in to prevent any reference to the genocide of Armenians during Israel's 55th Independence Day celebrations, officials said Tuesday.

The initial program for Wednesday's festivities had been scheduled to include an Israeli woman of Armenian origin, Naomi Nalbandian, as one of 12 people selected to light torches at the traditional ceremony. She was to have presented herself as a "third generation survivor of the (Armenian) genocide carried out in 1915" by the Turks.

(...)Ankara's ambassador to Israel, Feridun Sinirlioglu, told Israeli foreign ministry director Victor Harel of Turkey's disapproval at any such reference.

After the intervention, and in response to a request by parliamentary speaker Reuven Rivlin, Nalbandian grudgingly agreed to drop the reference to the Armenian genocide. The words were also hastily erased from a plaque that was to have been unveiled at the ceremony. (...)

05/23/03 - Parliamentary Election Must be Kept Free of Arbitrary Arrests - Human Rights Watch

There must be no repeat of the mass arrests that marred Armenia's recent presidential election, Human Rights Watch said today. Armenia's parliamentary elections are slated to take place May 25.

In a 24-page briefing paper released today, Human Rights Watch documents the arbitrary arrest of hundreds of opposition activists during the presidential elections, the abuse of the Soviet-era Code of Administrative Offenses to justify the arrests, and the disabling impact the arrests had on the opposition's campaign. Human Rights Watch also called for urgent reform of Armenia's flawed administrative justice system.

'The Armenian authorities use the outdated code on punishing public order misdemeanors as a tool of political repression,' said Elizabeth Andersen, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division. 'This weekend's elections will be a test of their will to stop this practice.'

More than a hundred opposition activists were given prison sentences of up to fifteen days in February and March under the code, for attending, or allegedly misbehaving at, rallies that the authorities arbitrarily deemed 'unauthorized.' Police denied them access to counsel, and judges tried them in closed, cursory hearings at which defendants were denied attorneys, the opportunity to present evidence, and their right to appeal. (...)

05/24/03 - Armenian pupils of Turkey are commanded to deny the genocide - Press Release

Brussels, Belgium - The European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy, launched today an appeal asking Europe to resist the

recent directive of the Turkish National Education Ministry that incites pupils to deny the Greek, Syriac and Armenian exterminations.

This Ministry document, sent on April 14th to the Primary and Secondary schools of Turkey, asks the principals of those establishments to arrange conferences and "testimonies" attesting that Turkey never exterminated those minorities. It particularly asks the pupils to write essays on the theme of the "fights against the allegations of genocide". In this dissertation, the minister categorically prohibits to use formulas, such as "Turks could kill Armenians" and asks that they be replaced with other sentences that present those facts as a necessity in front of "massacres perpetrated by Armenians". A first report, drafted in this sense should be sent back by schools to the regional directorates of Ministry before May 30th.

The European Armenian Federation specifies that such measures touch notably the Armenian schools of Istanbul, where 70 000 Armenians live today.

"We are particularly shocked by the cynicism of this directory which encourages not only Turkish aggressiveness towards minorities, but also requires of such crimes from minorities' children to accuse their own parents who are victims of extermination," declared the President of the European Armenian Federation.(...)

05/26/03 - Armenian elections show improvement over presidential voting, but fail to meet international standards in key areas - Press Release

Sunday's parliamentary elections in Armenia marked improvement over the recent presidential voting, but failed to meet international standards in several key areas, concluded an international observation mission led by the Parliamentary Assemblies of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions And Human Rights (ODIHR). The election was marred by a fatal shooting at a polling station on election day.

"After a generally peaceful campaign we have observed an election which represents an improvement in meeting international standards, despite a

number of serious incidents and shortcomings during the electoral process", said Giovanni Kessler, the head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation and special co-ordinator appointed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office. "However, the low turnout is a clear indication of the lack of voter confidence in the electoral process and political institutions in the country. Enhancing such confidence is the major challenge to the political leadership in Armenia."

"There was undoubted progress towards meeting international standards despite a limited number of reported incidents of a very serious nature", added Lord Russell-Johnston, head of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly delegation. "I hope that those responsible will be held accountable and that there will be no return to the sense of impunity evident in the recent presidential election."

"While the legislative framework generally provides a basis for democratic elections, Armenia's leadership must demonstrate more determination in order that future elections meet international standards", said Ambassador Barry, head of the OSCE/ODIHR long-term observation mission.

The international observers noted several improvements in comparison with the recent presidential election, particularly with regard to the campaign and the media coverage. However, the observers pointed out that these improvements mirrored a similar development during the previous succession of presidential and parliamentary elections in 1998 and 1999, which also failed overall to comply with international standards. In addition to a generally inadequate performance of the election administration, the mission again observed a number of irregularities during election day, including falsification of results, intimidation of observers, and violations of the secrecy of the ballot during military voting.

The international observation mission stressed that its final conclusion on the extent to which the elections meet international standards will depend on the transparency of the tabulation and announcement of results, and the complaints resolution process.

05/29/03 - Armenian voters reject proposed constitutional amendments - RFE/RL

Fewer than the required one-third of all of Armenia's 2.33 million registered voters approved the package of constitutional amendments put to a national referendum concurrently with the 25 May parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Yerevan reported on 28 May. Only 46 percent of the 1.2 million voters who participated in the referendum approved the proposed changes. Opposition parties claimed the official figures released by the Central Election Commission late on 27 May artificially inflated support for the amendments, which the opposition claims would have expanded the president's powers to appoint senior officials without the approval of parliament.

05/31/03 - Pro-presidential parties dominate new Armenian parliament - Arminfo

Pro-presidential parties dominate the new Armenian National Assembly, although non-party candidates have won a significant number of seats, according to the final results of the elections announced on 31 May. The independent candidates won 36 seats, all under the majority, or first-past-the-post, system, Armenian news agency Arminfo reported.

The pro-presidential Republican Party of Armenia, which dominated the outgoing parliament and government, has the most seats of any party or bloc, 32. It won nine majority seats and 23 through proportional representation. The pro-presidential Orinats Yerkir, or Law-Governed Country, Party won 18 seats, six in majority constituencies and 12 through proportional representation.

The opposition Justice bloc won 14 seats through proportional representation, while the Anrapetutyun (Republic) Party, which is part of the bloc, won one majority constituency.

The pro-presidential Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaktsutyun won 11 seats through proportional representation. The National Unity Party, which sometimes places itself in the pro-presidential camp, won nine proportional representation seats, while the newly created United Workers' Party won six PR seats.

A candidate from the minor Pan-Armenian Workers' Party won a majority seat.(...)

06/04/03 - EU dangles huge grant if Armenia shuts nuclear plant - Agence France Presse

The European Union has dangled the promise of a 100-million-euro (117-million-dollar) grant to Armenia if the former Soviet republic shuts down its aging nuclear power plant, an EU official said Wednesday.

"This nuclear power plant must be closed as soon as possible," said Hugues Mingarrelli, who oversees former Soviet republics for the European Commission, the EU's executive arm.

"Right now, we are conducting studies to find the best alternative to the power plant."

Armenia's Mezamor plant, located some 30 kilometers (20 miles) west of the capital Yerevan, provides some 40 percent of all energy used by the tiny, impoverished country. Built in 1977, it was shut down in 1988 after a massive earthquake shook the mountainous state.

But the authorities were forced to reopen the two-reactor plant in 1995 because the country, reeling from post-Soviet malaise, faced an energy crisis.

EU officials said one energy alternative for Armenia would be the construction of a natural gas pipeline from Iran, although funding for the project was still being discussed by the 15-nation bloc and other international organizations.

06/04/03 - Turkey : Teachers arrested in the framework of the Armenian genocide denial campaign - European-Armenian Federation for Justice & Democracy

The Turkish newspaper « Radikal » reveals that on this 30th of May, some acts of repression have been performed against teachers who tried to get information on the procedures set by the Turkish government to "fight against the Armenian genocide allegations".

On this day, the subprefect of Elbely county (province of Kilis) had organized a seminar for all the officials of the county in the framework of the recent campaign organized by the Ministry of Education and officially entitled "fight against genocide allegations".

Among the numerous people compelled to take part to this seminar, a teacher, Mrs Hülya Akpinar asked questions to the speaker M. Mehmet Kabadjic which deeply angered him. Following his violent reaction, many teachers left the room to protest. Legal proceedings have thus been immediately taken against six teachers for "provocation". On the same day, Mrs Hülya Akpinar was arrested and immediately prosecuted. She was fined 1,5 billion of Turkish Lira (nearly 1000 euros) to the State....)

06/07/03 – ANCA called to resist Turkish attempts to derail progress in US recognition of Armenian Genocide – Pan Armenian News

Net The Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) called on Armenian Americans to resist efforts by the Turkish Government to manipulate them and undermine recent progress toward U.S. recognition of the Armenian Genocide. June 6 an ANCA letter reported that Turkish diplomatic representations in the United States "are seeking to arrange meetings with Armenian American leadership organizations for senior Turkish government official Ecvet Tezcan representing Turkey's foreign policy and intelligence gathering agencies." "The real purpose of this effort is to deceive the U.S. society into believing that a "direct dialogue with Armenians" is currently in process," - the statement says. Such actions, ANCA considers, intend to derail "the most recent progress in the U.S. Congress toward recognition of the Armenian Genocide."

06/07/03 – Council of Europe sets new deadline for Armenia to repeal death penalty - Arminfo

The date for the ratification of the 6th protocol of the European Human Rights Convention which requires the (full and unconditional) abolition of the death penalty, which was previously set for June this year, has been extended until December 2003, the deputy speaker of the Armenian National Assembly, Tigran Torosyan, told today's news conference. He said that such an agreement had been achieved during the 25 May visit by a representative of the

monitoring commission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Torosyan believes that the PACE met Armenia halfway since the ratification of the 6th protocol immediately after the parliamentary elections would be impossible.

06/11/03 – Parties having majority seats in Armenian parliament form new government – Pan Armenian News

The representatives of the Republican Party of Armenia, "Orinats Yerkir" party and "Dashnaksutyun" Armenian Revolutionary Federation who won the majority of seats in the Armenian parliament signed a memorandum on principles of formation of the new membership of the state government today. As Armenian prime minister Andranik Margarian who signed the document on the RPA part told journalists, "Orinats Yerkir" party and "Dashnaksutyun" Armenian Revolutionary Federation will receive three ministerial portfolios each. The Republican Party will keep six ministerial posts. Besides the post of the prime minister the RPA will manage the following ministries: the ministry of territorial administration and infrastructures activity coordination, the ministry of finance and economy, the ministry of trade and economic development, the ministry of ecology as well as the ministry of communication. It should be noted, that "Orinats Yerkir" party members will head the ministries of town planning, education, and science as well as of the culture, youth and sports. "Dashnaksutyun" will hold the posts of ministers of agriculture, health and social maintenance. Three ministerial posts these being the ones of defense, foreign affairs and justice will remain out of the "frames" of the coalition and the heads of these ministries will be appointed by the president himself. Due to the memorandum signed, the prime minister emphasized, the above mentioned parties will account for the activity of the state legislative and executive bodies in equal, "irrespective of the fact how many portfolios will pass into the possession of each party". At the same time Andranik Margarian emphasized that the coalition

government will cooperate with other supporting the president political forces as well.

06/13/06 - Armenia Removed From U.S. Human Trafficking Blacklist - RFE/RL

By Emil Danielyan

The United States has removed Armenia from the list of countries which could face U.S. sanctions for their alleged failure to prevent the forced transport of human beings from or through their territory. An annual report by the U.S. State Department lists Armenia among 74 nations that are making 'significant efforts' to comply with 'minimum standards' for the elimination of human trafficking. Its name figured last year in the 'Tier 3' group of states which the department believes are doing little to tackle the problem.

The 2003 report, released on Wednesday, says the Armenian authorities have acknowledged the need for urgent action and cracked down on some suspected traffickers over the past year.

'The Government of Armenia does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so,' the report says. 'The government increased its focus on trafficking as a domestic and international issue, and focused more law enforcement resources on the problem.' (...)

06/14/03 - Economically struggling Armenia has asked Russia for additional grain supplies because it cannot provide enough bread from its own crops, Prime Minister Andranik Markarian said Saturday - Associated Press Worldstream

Markarian said he appealed to Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov for more Russian grain to tide tiny Armenia over until the harvest.

He did not say how much grain he requested, and government officials refused to say how much the country normally receives from Russia.

Armenia's own grain crops can provide for only about half of the

demand for bread and related products, Markarian said, and consumer prices for the products has risen by 10-20 percent in recent days.

Markarian said Armenian officials had reached a preliminary agreement on additional grain supplies with Russian President Vladimir Putin's representative in fertile southern Russia, Viktor Kazantsev, during a recent visit to Armenia, a former Soviet republic with a population of 3.3 million.

Armenia's economy has suffered since the Soviet breakup of 1991, and tense relations with neighbors Azerbaijan and Turkey have aggravated the situation and increased the Caucasus Mountain nation's reliance on Russia.

06/20/03 – International socialist organization urges Turkey to recognize Armenian Genocide - PanArmenian News

"Turkey should recognize the Armenian Genocide", - forum chairman, head of Leftist Democratic Party of Italy Pierro Fasino stated at the conference of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) for Central and Eastern European states. As Yerevan "Yerkir" newspaper writes, in the work of the conference held in the Bulgarian parliament building June 14-15, the ISO secretary general Luis Ayala took part. Among the delegates of the European Socialist parties there was member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Bureau Mario Nalbandian. During his speech he presented the results of the Armenian elections, the course of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict settlement and the anti-Armenian policy pursued by Turkey. The Armenian delegation voted against the suggested at the conference resolution on the European Union widening, which included the issue of Turkey's entry in the EU. Turkey, in their opinion, should fulfill its obligations not nominally, but in practice.

06/25/03 - Human rights group calls on Turkey to recognise Armenia genocide - Agence France Presse

A leading human rights organisation on Wednesday called on Turkey to recognise that the massacre of up to 1.5 million Armenians at the

beginning of the last century was genocide.

The International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR) said in an open letter to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan that it was worried by recent Turkish educational guidelines regarding Turkey's treatment of minorities, especially Armenians.

The guidelines, said the IFHR, called on schools to "lead a negationist campaign regarding the oppression of minorities throughout Turkish history, in particular with regard for the Armenian community."

(...)

06/25/03 – Turkish citizens residing in Europe called Ankara to recognize Armenian Genocide - PanArmenian News

On the day of the 16-th anniversary of the adoption by the European Parliament the first resolution, appealing to Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide, a petition of the "Union of Genocide Opponents" representing the Turkish citizens living in Germany was handed to European Parliament chairman Pat Cox. According to the report of the European Parliament Department for links with the press and public relations, the petition maintaining the appeal to the Turkish parliament to recognize the Armenian Genocide of 1915 was signed by 11 000 people, 10 000 of them being the citizens of Turkey.

06/25/03 – Suggestion on non-recognition of Armenian delegation authorities in pace aroused European Parliament Arian's surprise - PanArmenian News

The members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe expressed their disagreement with CE observing mission reporter Bernard Schreiner's suggestion on non-recognition of the Armenian delegation authorities in the PACE because of the violations taken place in the course of the parliamentary elections in Armenia. Reporter of the PACE monitoring group Irzhi Yaskernya and member of the mentioned-above group Jozef Yuvio emphasized in their yesterday's speeches that the present suggestion did not correspond to the logic of the observing mission activities. As head of the Armenian delegation in

PACE Armen Rustamian told in his interview to the Armenian Public Television, the present suggestion even aroused confusion among some delegates of the session. Particularly, French deputy Roslan, who refused to participate in the discussion of this issue, did not hide his surprise. In connection with the insertion of such an item in the report a number of other European parliamentarians expressed their dissatisfaction in the course of conversations held with the Armenian delegation members. A. Rustamian emphasized that the above-mentioned 53-th item of the report not being the result of the inner-parliamentary discussions on Armenia cannot be considered as a suggestion on Armenia. According to the CE regulations, reports of such character are only taken into account but are not considered to be a resolution regarding this or that state, he added.

GEORGIA / GEORGIE

05/02/03 – Western ambassadors in Georgia stress need for democratic elections - RFE/RL

A group of prominent Western ambassadors posted to Georgia met with President Eduard Shevardnadze on 1 May to express their collective concern that the upcoming parliamentary elections must be free and fair, "Civil Georgia" reported. British Ambassador to Georgia Deborah Barnes Jones told Shevardnadze that London feels strongly that Georgia must ensure democratic elections, while U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles called on the Georgian government to "take measures to ensure fair elections to move forward toward democracy."

05/07/03 – Georgian census results reveal sharp population decrease - RFE/RL

Officials of the State Statistics Department on 6 May released the official results from the country's January 2002 census (...). The figures reveal a 20 percent fall in the population, which fell by 1.1 million people since 1989. The country's 1989 population was 5.5 million, while the latest census found the population to be just 4.4 million. The census did not include information from Abkhazia, which

has an estimated population of 160,000, and South Ossetia, with a reported 70,000 residents. A detailed breakdown of the census results, with figures broken down by gender and other criteria, will not to be available for several days, officials said. Unofficial estimates suggest that roughly half of the population decline is accounted for by migration to Russia.

05/09/03 - Georgian Interior Ministry increases police presence along border with south Ossetia - RFE/RL

Georgian Deputy Interior Minister Zurab Khazhalia announced on 7 May that the police force deployed along the Georgian border with South Ossetia will be increased from the current level of 47 officers to 80, Interfax reported. The reinforcements are to be stationed near the village of Kurta, mainly in response to a recent rise in crime in the area, with last week's slaying of four residents being the most notable example.

05/09/03 - Georgian prisoners end hunger strike - RFE/RL

More than 4,500 prisoners in several Georgian penal facilities on 7 May ended a hunger strike after Georgian authorities formed a new commission to investigate their cases, "Civil Georgia" reported. The prisoners organized a coordinated national hunger strike to protest poor living conditions and to draw attention to the serious backlog of appeals.

05/14/03 - NATO secretary-general urges Georgia to speed up reforms - Prime-News news agency

At his meeting behind closed doors with deputies in parliament, NATO Secretary-General George Robertson, who paid a one-day visit to Tbilisi on Wednesday 14 May, stressed the importance of Georgia stepping up reforms in the defence sphere as well as institutional reform of governance in its drive to join NATO.

Journalists were told this by member of the opposition Traditionalist parliamentary group Maia Nadiradze after the meeting with the secretary-general. According to her, the NATO secretary-general welcomed Georgia's desire to join NATO but added that the pace of reform was

insufficient.

Nadiradze quoted Robertson as saying that, in order for it to join NATO, a great deal "would have to be done by Georgia itself". Earlier on Wednesday, Robertson held meetings with President Eduard Shevardnadze, Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili and Defence Minister Davit Tevzadze. He also met students at Georgian Technical University.

On Wednesday evening the NATO secretary-general left for Armenia.

Georgia officially stated its desire to join NATO at the alliance's summit in Paris last year.

05/16/03 - Georgian President rules out OSCE representation on election commissions - RFE/RL

In a 15 May interview with the independent television station Rustavi-2, President Eduard Shevardnadze said he sees no need to include representatives from the OSCE and other international organizations in election commissions, Caucasus Press reported. Some opposition parties who objected to the present draft election bill, under which the president would name nine of the 11 members of the Central Election Commission, proposed international representation on the commission in order to preclude falsification of the outcome of the ballot. Shevardnadze also said Georgia made the correct decision in affirming its support for the U.S. military operation in Iraq. But he warned that it is "naive" to expect that, in return, the United States will send troops to help Georgia restore its control over the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia. Shevardnadze also divulged that he considers several "erudite and well-educated" individuals possible candidates to succeed him as president when his second and final term expires on April 2005, but he declined to name the individuals in question.

05/19/03 - Georgian President calls on opposition to help ensure parliamentary elections will be fair...- RFE/RL

In his regular Monday radio interview, President Eduard

Shevardnadze pledged on 19 May that the Georgian authorities will make every effort to ensure that the 2 November parliamentary elections are free and fair, Interfax and Caucasus Press reported. But he added that this will be possible only with the "constructive cooperation of all political forces." The previous day, Adjara Supreme Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze said in Batumi that his Revival bloc will boycott the election unless the Georgian government guarantees it will be free and democratic, Caucasus Press reported.

05/19/03 - ...As parliament factions fail to agree on optimum election commission composition - RFE/RL

Georgian parliamentary factions failed to reach agreement during talks in Tbilisi on 19 May on the optimal composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC), Caucasus Press and the website of the independent television station Rustavi-2 reported. Vitalii Khazaradze, who heads the parliament faction of the former ruling Union of Citizens of Georgia, advocated forming a new CEC on which those political parties that polled a minimum of 7 percent of the vote in the 1999 elections would be represented. That model would, however, exclude the United Democrats, New National Movement, and New Rightists -- all of which were created within the past two years. Parliament is to begin on 20 May debating two alternative sets of amendments to the president election legislation. One, drafted by the government, proposes that the existing leadership should appoint CEC members, while the opposition insists that CEC members should be selected by political parties.

05/19/03 - Georgia Claims Part of Azerbaijan's Territory - AA.Azat Artsakh

According to the Georgian diplomat Tbilisi wants to return the monastery, which is now in the territory of Azerbaijan. At the end of May and at the beginning of June the question of reconsidering the state border between Georgia and Azerbaijan will be discussed in Tbilisi. According to the agency "Novosti", the representative of the Georgian minister of foreign affairs Z. Kandelaki said that 2/3 of the

state border is agreed by both Georgia and Azerbaijan. The question of some parts is still undecided, especially the area of "Krasni Most". During the upcoming meeting the Georgian delegation is going to request their Azerbaijani colleagues to return the part of the Azerbaijani territory, the district, where the Davit Gareji monastery (19th century) is located. The Azerbaijani Ministry for Foreign Affairs could not give any comments on the situation around the negotiations between Azerbaijan and Georgia. Besides the monastery there are other Georgian historical monuments in Azerbaijan, such as Saint Nino church in the district of Kakhi.

05/21/03 – Georgian officials make contradictory statements on alleged Al-Qaeda presence - RFE/RL

Commenting on 20 May on a U.S. ABC Television broadcast earlier that day reporting the alleged presence in Georgia of Al-Qaeda bases, Georgian State Security Minister Valerii Khaburzanian said there are no such bases in those regions of Georgia controlled by the central government, but that he does not exclude the possibility that such bases exist in Abkhazia, Caucasus Press and Interfax reported. Khaburzanian said in February that Islamic militants had fled from Georgia's Pankisi Gorge during the fall of 2002 and taken refuge in Abkhazia. Georgian National Security Council Secretary Tedo Djaparidze said on 20 May with reference to the ABC claims that no threat to the international community emanates from Georgia, ITAR-TASS reported.

05/22/03 – Georgian prosecutor-general asks for parliament Deputy's immunity to be revoked - RFE/RL

The Prosecutor-General's office has asked parliament to lift the immunity from prosecution of former Tax Minister Mikhail Machavariani, whom an investigation has identified as the playing the key role in the 5 May assault on parliament deputy speaker Vakhtang Rcheulishvili, the newspaper "Tribuna" reported on 21 May, according to Caucasus Press. The paper claims that Machavariani could also face charges of misappropriating some \$3 million while serving as minister. On 22

May, Machavariani and fellow deputy Giorgi Baramizde, who was also involved in the brawl, told journalists they are ready to forfeit their immunity voluntarily, according to the website of the independent television station Rustavi-2. Baramidze claimed that the Prosecutor-General's Office is acting under pressure from the Georgian government.

05/26/03 - Iran prepared to assist in Abkhazia's dispute – IRNA

Iran's Ambassador to Georgia Hossein Aminian Tousi said here Monday that Iran is prepared to assist in resolving the Abkhazia dispute in Georgia.

He also declared Iran's full support for Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty, adding, "Establishment of peace and security in the Caucasus is an Iran's important foreign policy priority." He said the upcoming visit by the Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze to Iran will help to further cement the already cordial ties as well as bolstering regional security.

[...] Earlier in April Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi told Shevardnadze that security in southern Caucasus is of the utmost importance to the Islamic Republic. "Regional countries must play their role in guaranteeing security (in southern Caucasus) in order to achieve economic development," Kharrazi said.

[...] Iran shares no borders with Georgia but it neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan which are Georgia's immediate neighbors.

Shevardnadze announced his country's readiness to add steam to ties with Iran at the highest level and boost exchange of visits between the two countries. (...)

05/29/03 – Georgian election law talks deadlocked - RFE/RL

Talks in recent days between the various Georgian parliament factions and speaker Nino Burdjanadze have failed to yield a solution to the ongoing disagreement over the optimal composition of the Central Election Commission, Caucasus Press reported. Opposition factions have rejected the government's proposal that the commission be staffed with government officials, and suggested instead that all political parties that polled a minimum of 4 percent of the

vote in the 1999 parliamentary elections be represented. Movement for Democratic Reforms faction head Kote Kemoularia argued that the commission should be made up of international experts, as was the case in the elections held Bosnia in 1996 after the 1995 Dayton agreement came into effect. Two Council of Europe experts are expected in Tbilisi on 3 June to review preparations for the 2 November parliamentary elections.

06/02/03 – Georgian opposition rejects leadership's election concessions - RFE/RL

Following talks on 30 May between Minister of State Avtandil Djorbenadze and parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze, Djorbenadze announced that the government is prepared to accept a model for appointing a new Central Election Commission under which the authorities would propose nine members of that body and the opposition 10, Caucasus Press reported. But opposition parliament factions rejected that compromise, arguing that two of the political parties the government considered for that purpose as opposition in fact support the present leadership. Parliament adjourned late on 30 May without adopting the new draft election code. Nor did opposition factions attend a further round of discussions on the code scheduled for 31 May.

06/03/03 – Georgian opposition stages mass protest...- RFE/RL

Some 7,000 people gathered on 3 June outside the parliament building in Tbilisi in a protest convened by five opposition parties: the National Movement, United Democrats, New Rightists, Union of Traditionalists, and the People's Party of Georgia, Caucasus Press reported. They were joined by supporters of deceased President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the extraparlimentary Georgian Popular Front. The demonstrators are demanding the dismissal of the present Central Election Commission (CEC), the appointment of a new CEC on a parity basis, and the adoption of a new election code that will preclude the authorities falsifying the outcome of the 2 November parliamentary elections in order to retain their control of the legislature. United Democrats leader Zurab Zhvania

said the demonstrators will not disperse until their demands are met, Caucasus Press reported, while National Movement leader Mikhail Saakashvili called on them to seize control of the parliament building if the Georgian authorities reject their demands.

06/05/03 – UN observers abducted in Georgia - RFE/RL

Three members of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and their interpreter have been abducted in the Kodori Gorge, local Governor Emzar Kvitsiani announced on 5 June. The observers began a six-day patrol of the gorge on 2 June together with members of the Russian peacekeeping force deployed in the Abkhaz conflict zone, whom the kidnappers later released.

Caucasus Press on 5 June quoted the UNOMIG office in Sukhum as saying that the observers were abducted at gunpoint by masked men who opened fire on their car. It is the fourth such abduction of UN personnel in Kodori in the past four years. In all previous cases, the observers were finally released unharmed and the kidnappers were never apprehended.

06/06/03 - Discrimination continues in Georgia - YERKIR Online

INFO - The Georgian Parliament is to discuss the Law on Passports and Birth Certificates in the coming days. The law has been adopted in the first reading a month ago. This time, some problematic issues are to be discussed: for example, all birth certificates in Georgia will state "Georgian" for nationality. When the bill was discussed in the first reading, ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani members were absent. It is expected that they will participate this time to attempt removal of discriminating sections from the law.

06/10/03 – UN observers released in Georgia - RFE/RL

The three UN observers and their interpreter who were taken hostage in the Georgian-controlled sector of the Kodori Gorge on 5 June have been released following negotiations on 9 and 10 June between the Georgian leadership and the kidnappers, Caucasus Press reported on 10 June. The multimillion-dollar ransom the

kidnappers reportedly demanded was not paid. As on three previous occasions, the Georgian authorities agreed not to make any attempt to apprehend the kidnappers, who have been given the chance to leave the gorge. All three previous abductions (in October 1999 and June and December 2000) likewise took place in the upper, Georgian-controlled sector of the gorge. But President Eduard Shevardnadze said on 9 June in his weekly radio address that he is certain the kidnappers were not residents of Kodori but "our enemies and those who betray us," Caucasus Press reported.

06/12/03 – Georgia rejects U.S criticism over human trafficking - RFE/RL

Georgian National Security Council Secretary Tedo Djaparidze told Caucasus Press on 12 June that the inclusion of Georgia in the third-annual U.S. State Department report, which was released the previous day, listing 15 countries liable for sanctions because of their failure to take measures to combat human trafficking is "a misunderstanding" based on inaccurate data. Other countries on that list include Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. The Georgian parliament last week amended the Criminal Code to designate human trafficking a criminal offense punishable by five to 10 years' imprisonment.

06/16/03 – UN Georgia mission suspends patrols in Kodori - RFE/RL

Meeting in New York on 13 June with visiting Georgian parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stressed that it is imperative that those responsible for the 5 June abduction in the Kodori Gorge of three members of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) be apprehended and brought to trial, Caucasus Press reported. The kidnappers were surrounded by Georgian troops and released their hostages on 10 June after being granted free passage by Kodori Governor Emzar Kvitsiani. Also on 13 June, Annan's special representative for Abkhazia, Heidi Tagliavini, said in Tbilisi that UNOMIG has suspended patrols of Kodori for an unspecified time period, Caucasus Press reported.

06/16/03 – Eduard Shevardnadze confirmed his denial to run for 3rd President term - PanArmenian News

Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze confirmed today his denial to run for the president for 3rd term in 2005. At the same time, as reported by "ITAR-TASS" agency, he spoke against the constitutional amendments forbidding one and the same individual to be elected for the supreme state post of the country. It should be noted that E. Shevardnadze was elected for this post in 1995 and 2000.

"It is early to speak where I will reside after I leave the presidential chair. Do not worry about me, when the time comes I will decide myself where to live: in Tbilisi, Moscow, Washington or in my native village of Mamati", - the Georgian leader said.

06/17/03 – Materials for "dirty bomb" discovered in Georgian capital - RFE/RL

During a routine check on 31 May, police discovered two containers with radioactive strontium-90 and caesium-137 in a taxi in Tbilisi, Georgian and Russian media reported on 16 June, quoting Georgian officials. The taxi was bound for Kobuleti on Georgia's Black Sea coast close to the Turkish border, and an Interior Ministry official said the containers were probably destined for export to Turkey.

Environment Minister Nino Chkhobadze described the find as "extremely serious." She said Georgia does not produce such substances, which could have been used to manufacture a so-called "dirty" bomb.

06/17/03 – Georgia explains refusal to sign CIS agreement on portable anti-aircraft missiles - RFE/RL

The Georgian Embassy in Moscow has released a statement clarifying the reasons for Georgia's refusal to sign a proposed CIS agreement to monitor sales of shoulder-launched Igla and Strela anti-aircraft missiles, Caucasus Press reported on 16 June. The statement said Georgia would have agreed to sign the agreement if Russia had not rejected its additional proposals to compile an inventory of all such

weapons and their registration numbers, to register their transfer from one country to another, and to provide Tbilisi with information on how many such weapons are currently stored at Russian military bases in Georgia.

06/18/03 – Georgia, Russia, UN discuss repatriation to Abkhazia - RFE/RL

Representatives of the Georgian government, the Russian Foreign Ministry, and the UN held talks in Moscow on 16-17 June on implementing the agreement reached three months earlier by the Russian and Georgian presidents on the return of Georgian displaced persons to Abkhazia, Georgian media reported. Georgian Ambassador to Moscow Zurab Abashidze told the independent television station Rustavi-2 on 18 June that there is no truth to Georgian media reports, including one by Rustavi-2, that the talks ended in a deadlock. He said the Russian representatives and the UN presented a program for repatriation and that the possibility of establishing a joint Georgian-Abkhaz administration in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali raion was discussed. Gali had a large Georgian population prior to the 1992-93 war and is the first region of Abkhazia to which Georgians are expected to return. The Abkhaz leadership was not represented at the talks, but Rustavi-2 reported that Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba is in Moscow and was being briefed on their progress. The next round of talks is scheduled for late June.

06/23/03 – Russian Ministry of Defense began to remove Russian ammunition and hardware from Georgian territory - Agency WPS

Russian Ministry of Defense started the removal of Russian ammunition and hardware from Georgian territory. According to the Georgian Ministry of Defense, Russia started the removal of its ammunition from the 130th Russian military depot in Sagaredzho. The ammunition and armaments will be handed over to the Russian military base in Armenian Gumri. The first train will depart on June 20. The total removal will finish in 5 days. Russia and Georgia had come to an

agreement about the removal of ammunition and hardware from Georgian territory. Representatives of the Georgian Ministry of Defense and Georgian law-enforcement bodies are carrying out the monitoring of loading.

06/26/03 – Council of Europe calls on Georgia to hold transparent elections - RFE/RL

Speaking at a press conference in Strasbourg on 25 June, Council of Europe Secretary-General Schwimmer said he hopes the 2 November Georgian parliamentary elections will not duplicate the "sad experience" of this year's Armenian elections, Caucasus Press reported (see Armenia item above). Schwimmer called on the Georgian government and opposition to make every effort to ensure that the ballot is fair and transparent. On 24 June, Caucasus Press quoted Bulgarian parliamentarian Jevgeni Kirillov as saying that Georgia has squandered the "credit of confidence" bestowed by its admission to the Council of Europe.

DAGHESTAN / DAGHESTAN

06/11/03 – Daghestan schedules discussion on constitutional amendments - RFE/RL

Daghestan's parliament on 10 June approved holding a Constitutional Assembly session on 10 July to discuss constitutional amendments that would replace the present bicameral parliament with a unicameral one and reduce the number of parliament deputies from 121 to 60, ITAR-TASS reported. In addition, it is proposed that beginning in 2007 the republic's head is to be elected in a republic-wide ballot.

At present, the State Council head is elected by the Constitutional Assembly, which comprises 120 members of the People's Council and 122 representatives from Daghestan's various towns and raions.

06/24/03 – Duma elections watchdog disbanded - RFE/RL

The State Duma decided on 21 June to disband its Elections Commission, which was headed by Deputy Aleksandr Salii, a member of the Agro-Industrial Group who was elected from the Communist Party list. The decision was made with 228 votes in favor -- just two more than the required minimum. According to the website, news of the commission's demise was greeted with enthusiasm in the regions "since in recent years not one regional election had occurred without 'troops' from the commission." Aleksandr Shemelev, executive director of the Moscow Bureau for Jurisprudence, told the website that the "many lawyers who practice in the sphere of election law evaluate the Duma's decision to dissolve the commission positively." The website also reported that Salii had incurred the wrath of a number of political consultants and members of regional election commissions. Analyst Ivan Preobrazhenskii wrote on politcom.ru on 23 June that Salii's commission participated as consultants in a number of scandalous elections, including in Bashkortostan and Norilsk. The commission was also responsible for documenting alleged fraud that occurred in the 2000 presidential election. It asserted that about 700,000 votes in Daghestan must have been wrongly awarded to President Putin.

ABKHAZIA / ABKHAZIE

05/16/03 – Georgian guerrilla killed in Abkhazia - RFE/RL

Abkhaz National Security Service head Givi Agrba announced on 16 May that Abesalom Arkania, whom he identified as one of the leaders of the Georgian guerrilla formation White Legion, was killed in an exchange of fire with Abkhaz special forces in Gali Raion the previous day, Caucasus Press reported. But Georgian sources claim Arkania was taken hostage by the Abkhaz and then executed in retaliation for the 4 May shooting of Abkhaz customs official Ruslan Khashba in the village of Tagiloni. Those sources say Arkania's body was found on 15 May in the village of Chuburkkindji, where Georgian and Abkhaz officials and members of the Russian peacekeeping force

and the UN Observer Mission in Georgia meet every Thursday to discuss the situation in the Abkhaz conflict zone.

05/19/03 – Abkhaz opposition criticizes new government - RFE/RL

Amtsakhara, the opposition movement founded by, but not restricted to, veterans of the 1992-93 war with Georgia, has issued a statement criticizing newly appointed Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba for failing to show independence in the selection earlier this month of the new cabinet, Caucasus Press reported on 17 May. The statement predicted that the new government will prove unable to effect any radical changes in the unrecognized republic or improve the living standards of the population. It was similar criticism by Amtsakhara that triggered the resignation in early April of the previous government headed by Gennadii Gagulia. The Georgian newspaper "Akhali taoba" reported on 19 May that Abkhazia is experiencing a severe grain shortage and its reserves will run out within days, according to Caucasus Press.

05/22/03 – Abkhaz security officials say Al-Qaeda in western Georgia... - RFE/RL

Abkhazia's First Deputy National Security Minister Nugzar Samsoni denied on 21 May that any Islamic militants have taken refuge on the territory of the unrecognized republic, Caucasus Press reported. He said there are some refugees from Chechnya in Abkhazia, but that the Chechen fighters who fought on the Abkhaz side during the 1992-93 war with Georgia left Abkhazia long ago. Commenting the previous day on a report by the U.S. ABC television network, Georgian State Security Minister Valeri Khaburzanias had said he does not rule out the presence in Abkhazia of Wahhabi sympathizers. On 22 May, Caucasus Press quoted Abkhaz State Security chief Givi Agrba as saying that ABC was correct in alleging that Al-Qaeda operatives are being trained in Georgia. Agrba said his agency has "reliable information" that there are Al-Qaeda militants in Georgia's Zugdidi Raion, which borders on Abkhazia, and that they are being trained by the

Georgian White Legion and Forest Brothers guerrilla groups.

05/22/03- ...As Georgian official says no evidence chemical weapons produced in Pankisi - RFE/RL

Speaking live on the independent television station Rustavi-2, Khaburzanias said on 22 May that there is no evidence to corroborate reports that Islamic terrorists ensconced in the Pankisi Gorge engaged in the production of chemical weapons, including ricin, Caucasus Press reported. Khaburzanias said no laboratories for the production of toxic substances have been located in Pankisi.

05/30/03 – Abkhaz parliament-in-exile head warns Georgian leadership over peacekeepers - RFE/RL

Tamaz Nadareishvili, chairman of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz Supreme Council, warned on 30 May that consent by the Georgian leadership at the upcoming CIS summit in St. Petersburg to prolong the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force deployed in the Abkhaz conflict zone will negatively affect relations between his parliament and the Georgian authorities, Caucasus Press reported. In the 1999 parliamentary elections, Nadareishvili's Abkhaz Liberation Party (AGP) aligned with the ruling Union of Citizens of Georgia. But on 27 May "Tribuna" reported that he is currently holding discussions with other political parties, and that in the 2 November elections he will align with whichever party includes in its program demands for the withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force and for a UN-backed peace-enforcement operation in Abkhazia. On 29 May, Nadareishvili threatened to mobilize some 100,000 Georgians who fled Abkhazia during the 1992-93 war to demonstrate in front of the Georgian parliament building if the legislature does not ratify by the end of next week the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Caucasus Press reported. Nadareishvili hopes that ratification will expedite the extradition to The Hague of those Abkhaz government officials whom he has accused of genocide and war crimes.

05/30/03 – Georgian paper claims CIS peacekeepers killed in shootout with Abkhaz - RFE/RL

The independent newspaper "Mtavari gazeti," which is financed by Russian oligarch Badri Patarkatsishvili, reported on 30 May that four Russian peacekeepers and two Abkhaz soldiers were killed and 14 soldiers wounded during a shootout in the village of Lata in the lower, Abkhaz-controlled reaches of the Kodori Gorge, Caucasus Press reported. The paper claimed the Abkhaz authorities are hushing up the incident, the date of which is unclear.

06/03/03 – Abkhazia anticipates new destabilization - RFE/RL

The Abkhaz leadership possesses reliable information that the Georgian authorities are planning to instigate unrest in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion in order to create a pretext for introducing a nationwide state of emergency, Caucasus Press on 3 June quoted Abkhaz First Deputy Premier Astamur Tarba as saying.

06/18/03 – Abkhaz calls for resumption of talks with Georgia - RFE/RL

Astamur Tania, who is an adviser to Vladislav Ardzinba, president of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia, said again on 17 June that Abkhazia is ready to resume talks with Georgia under the aegis of the UN-sponsored Coordinating Council, Caucasus Press reported. Those talks were suspended 18 months ago following an abortive incursion into Abkhazia by Chechen fighters. Also on 17 June, Abkhaz Deputy Defense Minister Garri Kupalba told Interfax that Georgia has not yet withdrawn the additional troops it deployed in the Kodori Gorge earlier this month following the abduction of three UN observers. Kupalba predicted that it will take six-eight weeks before the UN resumes its joint patrols of the gorge with CIS peacekeeping troops. Kodori Governor Emzar Kvitsiani said on 17 June that meanwhile Georgian and Abkhaz units will control the de facto border in Kodori between the upper, Georgian-controlled and lower, Abkhaz-controlled sectors, Caucasus Press reported.

06/18/03 – Russian, UN envoys agree that CIS peacekeepers should remain in Abkhazia - RFE/RL

On the sidelines of the Russian-Georgian talks, Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loshchinin, who is Russian President Putin's special envoy for the Abkhaz conflict, met with UN special envoy Heidi Tagliavini to discuss the repatriation process and other aspects of resolving the Abkhaz conflict, Caucasus Press reported. Tagliavini said the Russian peacekeeping force deployed under the CIS aegis in the Abkhaz conflict zone is an important stabilizing factor and cooperates "constructively" with the UN Observer Mission.

06/19/03 – Abkhaz foreign Minister rejects proposed international administration - RFE/RL

Sergei Shamba, who is foreign minister of the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia, said in Sukhum on 18 June that the joint Georgian-Abkhaz administration under the UN aegis that Georgia proposes establishing in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion concurrently with the repatriation to Gali of Georgian displaced persons is "unacceptable," Caucasus Press reported. Shamba also said that the Russian peacekeeping troops currently deployed under the CIS aegis in the Abkhaz conflict zone must remain there until a final solution to the conflict is reached. On 17 June, Georgian Ambassador to Russia Zurab Abashidze told Interfax that Tbilisi wants the peacekeepers' mandate amended to deploy them throughout Gali Raion, rather than in a 14-kilometer zone on the right bank of the Inguri River. In January, the Georgian National Security Council ruled that the CIS peacekeepers' mandate should be prolonged only if it is simultaneously amended to allow for their deployment throughout Gali.

06/19/03 – Abkhaz Defense Ministry says no agreement reached on Kodori - RFE/RL

In a statement released on 18 June, the Abkhaz Defense Ministry denied

that Georgians and Abkhaz have reached agreement on policing the de facto border between their respective zones of influence in the Kodori Gorge, Caucasus Press reported. Kodori Governor Emzar Kvitsiani had announced such an agreement the previous day, noting that it is unlikely that joint patrols of the gorge by CIS peacekeepers and members of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia will resume in less than six-eight weeks. The Abkhaz statement added, however, that the Abkhaz Defense Ministry and Kvitsiani's administration have agreed unofficially not to engage in any actions that could again destabilize the situation in the gorge.

06/24/03 – Abkhaz officials condemn Georgian Minister's threat of force - RFE/RL

In separate statements on 23 June, Abkhaz Vice President Valerii Arshba and Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba condemned Georgian State Security Minister Khaburzan's disclosure at a Georgian parliament session on 20 June that plans have been drafted for a new military operation to bring the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia back under the control of the central Georgian government, Apsnipress reported. Arshba reaffirmed Abkhazia's commitment to resolving the conflict peacefully, while Shamba construed Khaburzan's statement as proof that unnamed Georgian officials seek to prevent the repatriation to Abkhazia of Georgian displaced persons. Abkhaz Defense Minister Vyacheslav Eshba likewise affirmed the Abkhaz authorities' commitment to resolving the conflict peacefully, Apsnipress reported. He said any resort to violence by the Georgian side would postpone a resolution of the conflict for a long time.

06/27/03 – Abkhazia again rejects proposed international administration - RFE/RL

Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba has told Apsnipress that the Georgian leadership's proposal to establish a joint Georgian-Abkhaz administration under the UN aegis in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion

concurrently with the repatriation to Gali of Georgian displaced persons is unacceptable, Caucasus Press reported on 27 June. Shamba again insisted that repatriation is a purely humanitarian issue and accused the Georgian leadership of using the displaced persons as pawns in their "political games".

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

05/27/03 – Police in North Caucasus intercept explosives - RFE/RL

Police halted two trucks late on 25 May on the border between North Ossetia and Ingushetia and secured and destroyed the consignment of explosive they were loaded with. The drivers of both vehicles escaped. An FSB spokesman told Interfax the explosive was similar to that used in a 27 December truck-bomb attack on the Chechen government building in Grozny in which some 70 people were killed.

06/06/03 – FSB implicates Maskhadov in Mozdok suicide bombing - RFE/RL

Interfax on 5 June quoted Federal Security Service (FSB) spokesman Sergei Ignatchenko as saying that Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov knew in advance that the suicide bombing earlier that day in North Ossetia was being planned. Ignatchenko identified Maskhadov, together with Arab field commanders Abu al-Walid and Abu Omar as-Seif as responsible for planning and carrying out all terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus. Maskhadov for his part has repeatedly stressed that his men have orders not to perpetrate terrorist attacks on Chechen territory or against Chechen civilians. Also on 5 June, Russian Prosecutor-General Vladimir Ustinov met in Moscow with Russian President Putin to brief him

on the investigation into the bombing in North Ossetia, in which 17 people died, including the female suicide bomber, whose identity has not yet been established.

SOUTH OSSETIA / OSSETIE DU SUD

05/19/03 – Russia agrees to replace peacekeeping commander in South Ossetia - RFE/RL

Lieutenant General Valerii Yevnevich, who is commander in chief of Russian peacekeeping operations, told Caucasus Press on 17 May that the Russian Defense Ministry is prepared to accede to Georgia's demand to replace Major General Svyatoslav Nabdzorov, who since late 2002 has commanded the Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in South Ossetia. Georgian officials demanded his replacement earlier this month following the 3 May shooting of four Georgians near Tskhinvali. The Georgians argued that the Russian peacekeepers are unable to protect the local Georgian population. Nabdzorov responded that the killings were committed by criminals, and that his men are not required to carry out police duties. A 14-16 May meeting of representatives from Georgia, South Ossetia, the Russian peacekeeping force, and international organizations represented in Georgia ended without agreement being reached on an EU proposal to fund measures to stamp out smuggling between Georgia and the Russian Federation via South Ossetia. The South Ossetian representative proposed that a joint force composed of police from both North and South Ossetia be established to crack down on crime in South Ossetia, while the Georgian representative rejected that proposal, insisting that Georgian police are capable of tackling that problem on their own,

according to Caucasus Press on 16 May.

05/23/03 – Russian envoy visits South Ossetia - RFE/RL

Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loshchinin met in Tskhinvali on 21 May with Eduard Kokoyty, president of the unrecognized republic of South Ossetia, ITAR-TASS reported. Kokoyty characterized the Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in the region as "the main guarantor of peace and calm" there. The Georgian government has demanded the replacement of the commander of that force. Kokoyty also deplored the lack of progress in resolving economic problems with Tbilisi.

05/28/03 – Russia reportedly "considering" military bases in South Ossetia - RFE/RL

The Russian authorities are considering an offer by the leadership of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia to host Russian military bases that Russia has pledged to remove from elsewhere in Georgia, Caucasus Press on 27 May quoted South Ossetian parliament speaker Stanislav Kochiev as telling journalists.

06/03/03 – South Ossetian President accuses OSCE of Bias, double standards - RFE/RL

Eduard Kokoyty, who is president of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, has accused the OSCE of siding with Georgia in the dispute between the Georgian government and the breakaway republic, Caucasus Press reported on 3 June. He said the OSCE is exceeding its mandate in trying to pressure South Ossetia into accepting the status of an autonomous republic within Georgia. "Why did you not take into account [the paramount need to preserve] territorial integrity when you approved the dismemberment of Yugoslavia and the unification of Germany?" Kokoyty asked.

06/18/03 – Russian peacekeeping commander denies Georgian reports of his replacement - RFE/RL

Major General Svyatoslav Nabdzorov, who commands the CIS peacekeeping force deployed in the

unrecognized breakaway Republic of South Ossetia, told Caucasus Press on 17 June that reports of his imminent replacement are untrue. He said he will remain in his post until November. Nabdzorov also criticized the Georgian contingent of the South Ossetian peacekeeping force, saying that it lacks modern equipment, including for communications. Nabdzorov further warned that he will make a formal complaint to the Georgian Foreign Ministry unless Georgia suspends military helicopter flights over the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, and the surrounding area. He also rejected as untrue Georgian media reports that he was present at an incident in which the nephew of the unrecognized republic's president was injured by an stray bullet.

06/25/03 – Russia calls for greater efforts to resolve Georgian conflict with South Ossetia... - RFE/RL

Russian diplomat Mikhail Maiorov expressed concern on 24 June at what he termed the failing momentum of talks aimed at resolving the South Ossetia conflict, ITAR-TASS reported. He said Russia, as a member of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) formed to seek a solution to that conflict, is ready to do all in its power to expedite such a solution. He called on both sides to avoid further confrontations and to set about implementing the agreements they signed earlier. Also on 24 June, Caucasus Press reported that Boris Chochiev, who is one of South Ossetia's representatives on the JCC, has written to President Shevardnadze complaining that Georgia has failed to implement an agreement signed in December 2000 on funding reconstruction in South Ossetia and one signed in Lisbon in 2002. Chochiev blamed Georgian JCC representative Irakli Machavariani for the failure to implement those agreements.

06/25/03 – ... As ossetians seek to emigrate from Georgia - RFE/RL

Ossetians living in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge and elsewhere in eastern Georgia are lobbying the government of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia for permission to settle there, according to Caucasus Press on 24 June and

the Georgian newspaper "Akhali taoba" on 25 June. Of some 5,000 Ossetians who lived in Pankisi prior to the second Chechen war, only 1,000 remain there .

CHECHNYA / TCHETCHENIE

05/01/03 – MSF claims displaced Chechens afraid to go home - RFE/RL

A survey by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has found that the vast majority of displaced persons who have fled Chechnya are too scared to return. The survey, which the international aid group conducted in February and March among 3,209 Chechen families living in displaced-persons camps in neighboring Ingushetia --a total of 16,499 people -- found that more than 98 percent of the families have no plans to return to Chechnya and that 93 percent believe they would be in danger if they did. The survey concluded that those who have returned to Chechnya were placed "under tremendous pressure" to do so. President Putin's envoy for human rights in Chechnya, Abdul-Khakim Sultygov, called the MSF survey a "provocation" and said the assertion that more than 90 percent of displaced Chechens in Ingushetia do not want return home is "a pure lie," (...)

05/12/03 – Dozens killed in Chechnya car-bomb attack- RFE/RL

At least 30, and possibly as many as 40, people died on 12 May when a Kamaz truck loaded with explosives drove into the local administration building in the Nadterechnyi Raion in northern Chechnya. Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov immediately blamed the blast on fighters loyal to Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov. Some 80 people died in a similar car-bomb attack on the government building in Grozny in December. In Moscow, President Putin said on 12 May that such attacks will not halt the process of establishing a peaceful political

settlement in Chechnya, ITAR-TASS reported. Putin instructed government officials to speed up the drafting of the planned power-sharing treaty between Russia and Chechnya.

05/13/03 – Putin submits Chechen Amnesty bill to Duma - RFE/RL

President Putin submitted to the Duma's Committee on Legislation on 12 May the draft bill on an amnesty for Chechen fighters who voluntarily lay down their arms(...). The amnesty does not extend to those Chechen militants who have perpetrated terrorist acts or committed other serious crimes (...). The fate of an alternative amnesty bill drafted by Aslanbek Aslakhanov, Chechnya's deputy to the Duma, remains unclear.

05/20/03 – radical Chechen warlord claims responsibility for recent bombings - RFE/RL

In a statement posted on 19 May on kavkazcenter.com, field commander Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility for the 12 May car-bomb attack in Znamenskoe in northern Chechnya and the suicide bombing two days later in Gudermes Raion. Deputy Prosecutor-General Fridinskii declined to comment on Basaev's claim, noting that no evidence is yet available to substantiate it, Interfax reported. In February, Basaev likewise claimed responsibility for a car-bomb attack that seriously damaged the Chechen government building in Grozny. Meanwhile, in a written statement to Reuters, Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov denied responsibility for last week's bombings, saying he is convinced the perpetrators were acting on orders from Russia's special forces with the explicit aim of discrediting the Chechen resistance forces he commands.

05/29/03 – Putin meets with Chechen leaders - RFE/RL

President Putin met on 28 May at his suburban Moscow residence with Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov, Chechen Prime Minister Anatolii Popov, and Federal Minister for Chechen Affairs Stanislav Ilyasov, Russian media reported. Putin inquired about

restoration work in Grozny, the process of paying compensation to Chechens whose homes have been destroyed over the past decade, the development of small and medium-sized businesses, the work of the traffic police, and progress on drafting a treaty on the division of competencies between Chechnya and the federal center. Kadyrov said a working group established to prepare that document has so far produced "two or three" drafts. Putin commented that those drafts should be published in Chechnya to allow broad public discussion. Kadyrov also said that a Chechen State Council, composed of two representatives from each raion, will begin work on 10 June. The State Council will function as an interim parliament pending new parliamentary elections, for which no date has yet been set. (...)

06/04/03 – Chechen administration head dismisses cabinet - RFE/RL

Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov issued a decree on 3 June dismissing all cabinet ministers except Prime Minister Anatolii Popov and Security Council members (...). According to Adlan Magomadov, who is Kadyrov's envoy to the Kremlin, the dismissals are in line with the new Chechen Constitution adopted in a referendum in late March, according to which Kadyrov's status is now that of acting president, and new executive bodies are to be appointed. Kadyrov himself told Interfax that Popov has been asked to propose a new cabinet within two weeks, and that outgoing ministers will continue to perform their duties until a decision is made on whether they should be reappointed. He also said the number of deputy premiers is to be cut from five to three.

06/09/03 – Amnesty for Chechen fighters takes effect - RFE/RL

The State Duma passed the bill on an amnesty for participants in the last 10 years of fighting in Chechnya in the third and final reading on 6 June by a vote of 352-25, with one abstention. The law took effect from the time of its publication in the 7 June issue of "Rossiskaya gazeta." Russian presidential human rights commission head Ella Pamfilova said on 6 June that up to 1,000 Chechen fighters could be eligible for amnesty; Russian presidential

aide Sergei Yastrzhembskii said some 200 Chechens currently serving prison terms could be eligible, together with a similar number of Russian servicemen, Interfax reported. Russian presidential commissioner for human rights in Chechnya Abdul-Khakim Sultygov said on 6 June it is important to ensure that Chechen fighters who surrender their arms under the amnesty do not become blood-feud victims, Interfax reported. "Profil" on 26 May quoted Aslanbek Aslakhanov, Chechnya's deputy to the Duma, as saying that most of the 500 Chechens who surrendered during the 1999 amnesty were subsequently either murdered by fellow Chechens or disappeared during "mop-up" operations conducted by Russian troops.

06/10/03 – Moscow increases troop presence in Chechnya - RFE/RL

Despite the amnesty for Chechen prisoners that was passed by the State Duma on 6 June, the Kremlin is increasing the number of Russian troops in the republic.

The Defense Ministry has announced that this week it will dispatch an additional 1,000 paratroopers to Chechnya. The paratroopers will join soldiers from the Airborne Forces, Army, Interior Ministry, Border Troops, FSB, and Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU) who are already stationed in Chechnya. RTR commented that the fresh deployment is a reaction on the part of the Defense Ministry to the increased activity of Chechen fighters, and shows that the ministry does not place much faith in the effectiveness of the amnesty.

06/18/03 – Chechen President calls on his forces to observe Geneva conventions - RFE/RL

In a decree dated 30 May, Aslan Maskhadov ordered all field commanders to abide strictly by the Geneva Conventions and to avoid using weapons against Chechen citizens unless their own lives are in danger. He appealed to those Chechens who "for various reasons" have ended up serving "in the armed forces of a hostile state" to surrender to his men, promising that they will be rehabilitated.

Maskhadov also called for the formation of a state commission charged with promoting civic

harmony and preventing possible conflicts between his supporters and those of Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov. He further instructed the Chechen parliament and other legitimate organs of power to impress on the population that the Chechen Constitution adopted in 1992 remains valid. A new Chechen Constitution was adopted in March in a referendum, the outcome of which is widely believed to have been falsified.

06/23/03 – Chechen administration head, Russian Tsik chairman at odds over election timing - RFE/RL

Kadyrov told Interfax that he believes presidential elections in Chechnya should be held no later than October. He said he believes that "most politicians and public figures in Chechnya and the federal center" think likewise, and that he "cannot agree with those who, not knowing the situation in Chechnya, suggest holding the presidential elections in Chechnya concurrently" with the Russian State Duma elections on 7 December. He argued that holding the ballots simultaneously could result in "an acute polarization of society," but did not explain why this might happen. Also on 20 June, the office of presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District Viktor Kazantsev issued a statement saying that scheduling the Chechen presidential election for October is in line with "normal legal procedure," Interfax reported. In Moscow, Russian Central Election Commission (TsIK) Chairman Aleksandr Veshnyakov said on 21 June, as he has done on several previous occasions, that he believes that Chechen presidential elections should be held concurrently with those to the State Duma, ITAR-TASS reported.

06/26/03 – Interim Chechen Parliament asks Putin to schedule presidential poll for October - RFE/RL

Hussein Isaev, chairman of Chechnya's interim State Council, has written to President Putin asking him to set the date for elections for a new Chechen president for October 2003. Under the constitution approved in a referendum in March, October is the earliest date such a ballot may be held. Isaev reasoned

that speeding up the creation of constitutional bodies in Chechnya "will help normalize the social and political situation in the republic and reinforce the people's hope that they will be able to start living a normal life soon," according to Interfax.

**SOUTH RUSSIA /
RUSSIE DU SUD**

05/28/03 – As Kremlin mulls another regional merger - RFE/RL

In a further move toward reducing the overall number of federation subjects, the Russian leadership is considering holding a referendum following the 2004 presidential election on subsuming the Republic of Adygeya into Krasnodar Krai (...). Adygeya is an enclave of just under 8,000 square kilometers within Krasnodar Krai that received the status of a full-fledged federation subject only in 1992. The republic is primarily agricultural and depends on subsidies from Moscow for some 70 percent of its annual budget.

**NAGORNO KARABAKH /
HAUT KARABAGH**

05/10/03 – Proposals on Karabakh under preparation to suit all parties to conflict, OSCE minsk group co-chair said - PanArmenian News

The proposals on the Nagorno Karabakh settlement, being prepared by the OSCE Minsk group co-chairs, will satisfy all parties to conflict. As reported by "Echo" Baku newspaper, MG Russian co-chair Nikolay Gribkov told ATV channel in Paris. In his words, having once again reviewed all their previous proposals, the mediators arranged the new document including only most constructive elements fitting both parties. "The co-chairs consider the new proposals prepared will be accepted by the Armenian and Azeri presidents without fail, - the Russian diplomat said. - There may be some differences over a few aspects, but on the whole, we formed the new ideas in a way for them to bring all interested parties to conflict to accord." N. Gribkov also reported that in the course of the coming visit

to the conflict region the co-chairs would hold talks with Nagorno Karabakh leader Arkady Ghukasian. In response to official Baku protests on the occasion, the Russian co-chair noted that the MG members would meet not only with A. Ghukasian, but also with "Nagorno Karabakh Azeri community leader." "We do not favor any of the parties to conflict and we do not suppose the meeting with the leader of Armenians of Karabakh can cause any problems. On the contrary, we try to take into consideration the interests of all parties and we are trying to deduce a common position out of it," - the diplomat said. In his words, before arriving in the region the co-chairs will confer once again in Moscow. The meeting date is not made known yet.

05/13/03 – OSCE mission conducts schedule monitoring of contact lines of Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan armed forces - ARKA News Agency

OSCE mission conducted schedule monitoring of contact lines of Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan Armed Forces.

Monitoring group from NKR Defence Army positions was headed by Coordinator of the Office of Personal Representative of OSCE Acting Chairman Imre Palatinus (Hungary). The group consisted of field assistants Jan Repa (Slovakia) and Gennadi Korj (Ukraine). No violations of cease-fire regime were registered.

05/27/03 - OSCE monitors Azeri-Armenian contact line - Mediamax news agency

The OSCE mission held a monitoring on the contact line between the armed forces of Nagorny Karabakh and Azerbaijan in Agdam direction today.

The press service of the Foreign Ministry of the Nagorny Karabakh Republic (NKR) told Mediamax today that the monitoring had been held in accordance with the agreed schedule and no violation of the cease-fire regime had been registered.

The personal representative of the OSCE chairman-in-office, Andrzej Kasprzyk, headed the group from the positions of the NKR Defence Army.

A representative of the NKR Defence Ministry, who took part in

the monitoring, provided the OSCE observers with information about violations of the cease-fire regime by the Azerbaijani side during the period between the two latest monitoring sessions.

Members of the OSCE monitoring group also visited a military hospital and inquired about the health of two NKR soldiers. They were wounded by an Azerbaijani sniper in the area of today's monitoring in early May.

06/04/03 – EU supports the efforts of OSCE MG on karabakh conflict settlement - ARKA News Agency

EU supports the efforts of OSCE MG on Karabakh conflict settlement, Greek Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Armenia Antonios Vlavianos stated at the press conference in Yerevan. According to him, EU is interested in soonest settlement of the conflict, because it prevents the development of South-Caucasus region. "We understand that presidential and parliamentary elections in Armenia and oncoming presidential elections in Azerbaijan interrupted negotiating process, but we hope that the parties continue it", he said.

Note, the Karabakh conflict was reasoned by reluctance of Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh to live in Azerbaijan in 1988. Active military actions were stopped with signing in May 1994 of the agreement on setting the cease fire regime which is being observed up to date. At present there are talks on the conflict settlement, namely, within the terms of the OSCE Minsk Group. Russia, USA and France are the co-chairs.

06/10/03 – Russian negotiator pleased with talks with Azeri, Armenian sides on Karabakh - Arminfo

The cochairman of the OSCE Minsk Group, which deals with the resolution of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, Nikolay Gribkov, has given a positive assessment to the results of meetings with the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers in Madrid.

In an interview with Arminfo, the Russian cochairman of the group stressed that talks with both Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Quliyev had been held in a reassuring and

businesslike atmosphere. Nevertheless, Nikolay Gribkov did not spell out the content of the negotiations.

Gribkov added that the date of the cochairmen's visit to the region was not known yet. "This is our headache. There are many sides involved in the negotiations - Russia, the USA, France, Armenia, Azerbaijan, not to mention Nagorny Karabakh. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to determine a date which would suit all the sides," the cochairman said.

The date of the visit has been changed on a number of occasions for different reasons, including Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev's health problems.

06/12/03 - Monitoring at Jails in Nagorni Karabakh - Azat Artsakh

Albert Voskanian.

The non-governmental organization "Center of Civil Undertakings" operating since October 2003, with the permission of the NKR authorities, conducted monitoring at the prison of Shushi and the jail of NKR Ministry of Home Affairs. This was the first practical attempt in Nagorni Karabakh. The visits to such institutions will be regular and determined, and on the basis of the information accumulated during observations and visits the Center of Civil Undertakings will present reports to the PRI, which has a leading role in the sphere of reforms in the system of jails, other interested organizations and persons, and the corresponding structures of NKR. The center plans to give constant assistance to the staffs of the NKR jails in solving existing problems. In the result of the monitoring the Center of Civil Undertakings came to the conclusion that the moral and physical state of the people behind bars, the protection of their rights, the sanitary and hygiene conditions, organization of medical aid, food and rest are on a high level. At the same time the center made some suggestions concerning the existing drawbacks. The report based on the results of the monitoring was sent to international organizations, state bodies and persons who are concerned with the problem. This is the first attempt to introduce the situation in the NKR system of jails to the international community. The center is for transferring the responsibility for the system of jails

from the NKR Ministry of Home Affairs to the administration of justice, which will allow to reach the international standards and solve the problems existing in a more effective and complex way. The organization is also for the prohibition of the corporal punishment.

06/25/03 – Nagorno Karabakh conflict non-mentioning in report presented to pace caused Azeri party discontent – Pan Armenian news

The Azeri delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe expressed its discontent regarding member of PACE commission for political issues Andreas Gross's report named "Positive experiences of autonomous regions as a source of inspiration for conflict resolution in Europe". As "Echo" Baku newspaper writes, head of Azeri delegation in PACE Ilham Aliyev, in particular, protested against the fact that the Nagorno Karabakh conflict was not mentioned in the report. In response to this Andreas Gross elucidated that there was PACE special reporter on this issue.

06/27/03 – Azeri army ready to liberate Nagorno Karabakh, Azeri defense minister stated – Pan Armenian news

Military efficiency and preparedness of the Azeri army allow to restore the territorial integrity of the country to date. Azeri defense minister Safar Abiyev stated speaking at the measure on occasion of the armed forces day celebrated in the country yesterday. As reported by "Zerkalo" Azeri newspaper, touching upon the Nagorno Karabakh issue Abiyev spoke out with threats toward Armenia, which "considers itself to be the victor". In his words, "the situation has changed completely and the Azeri army is ready to liberate the occupied territories".

**INGUSHETIA /
INGOUCHIE**

06/03/03 – Chechen bombing suspects apprehended – RFE/RL

Three men were arrested in Ingushetia on 1 June on suspicion of involvement in the suicide bombings in Chechnya's

Nadterechnyi and Gudermes raions on 12 and 14 May, Chechen Prosecutor Vladimir Kravchenko told Interfax on 2 June. Kravchenko said the suspects were in possession of explosives that are being compared both with those used in the two suicide bombings and with the consignment of explosive intercepted in Ingushetia on 25 May.

JAVAKHK / DJAVAKHK

05/15/03 – Javakhetia students picket Georgian-Armenian frontier – PanArmenian News

Last morning some 150 Armenian students of Samtskhe-Javakhetia region of Georgia picketed the custom building near Bavra settlement situated on the Javakhetia strip of the Georgian-Armenian frontier. As reported by "Impulse" radio station, the picketers demanded to change the passport regime currently in force. Specifically, the students protest against a number of items in the Georgian legislation, putting custom obstacles on the way of citizens with Soviet passports. According to the source, some 170 thousand Armenians residing in Javakhetia have not got new Georgian passports yet. The action organizers intend to protest until the country authorities of both countries meet their demands.

06/12/03 – Georgia Armenians Condemn Endorsement, Push Armenian Issues – Asbarez online

Representatives of political organizations gathered in Akhalkalak on June 12 to review the position of Akhalkalak residents Concerning upcoming Georgian parliamentary elections. The discussion was organized by the Center of Reforms and Development of Democracy. Concerns were raised about several Armenian organizations in Tbilisi having already endorsed certain parties while the Armenian community, in general, has not yet made a final decision. Some of the speakers, on the other hand, urged those present to support Armenian-Georgian friendship.

As reported in Asbarez on May 23, certain representatives of Armenians in Georgia decided on

May 21 to support President Shevardnadze's political platform in Georgia's upcoming parliamentary elections. The gathering was organized and funded by Georgian authorities who also choose the participants--more than likely for their pro-presidential stance.

Certain Armenian groups at the Akhalkalak discussions sharply criticized the May 21 decision, conveying that Armenians should support those parties that pledge to pursue Armenian issues such as autonomy for Javakhk, state protection of Armenian cultural sites, and recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

As a result, the Akhalkalak gathering adopted a memorandum urging Armenian organizations not to make blanket statements on behalf of the entire Georgian Armenian community--considering no organization is entitled to such a right.

The memorandum also calls on the Georgian press to practice restraint and neutrality on reporting one-sided issues.

06/13/03 – Samtske-Javakhetia Armenians position on coming parliamentary election in Georgia not determined yet – PanArmenian News

representatives of Armenian social and political organizations of the Akhalkalak region of Georgia discussed issues referring the position of local Armenians on the coming parliamentary election in Georgia. As reported by "A-Info" agency, the meeting participants recognized that the position of the Armenian population in the issue is still uncertain. Some participants were for supporting political forces that come for strengthening the Armenian-Georgian friendship. There were also opinions to second forces, which will contribute to the solution of such problems as protection of the rights of Armenians, state concern over Armenian cultural centers, recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

DOCUMENTS

05/15/03 – New figures suggest Georgia is losing some of its best people in a massive migration

crisis - IWPR's Caucasus Reporting Service

By Lyudmila Rayeva in Tbilisi

Georgia's population has shrunk by one-fifth - a million people - in the 13 years since independence, according to census figures just released.

The much-delayed census results highlight for the first time the fullest extent of the country's migration crisis. The figures were released on May 6, more than a year after the census was held.

They show that Georgia now has a population of 4.4 million. The last census in Soviet Georgia in 1989 recorded a population of five and a half million people.

Government and independent experts agree that the main reason for the disastrous figures is a mass exodus of people, mainly of working age. "The country continues to be in a state of crisis, both politically and economically, and it is no big surprise that a huge number of its citizens are trying to find a new homeland for themselves where they can be sure of a stable and secure existence," said Tamaz Gugushvili of Georgia's ministry for refugees and resettlement.

Statistical and anecdotal evidence suggests that the country is losing its most valuable people - professionals, people with a higher education, and men and women aged between 20 and 50 who could be having children. As a result, the birth rate in Georgia has halved since 1992, and a disproportion has grown up between the sexes, with women making up 52.8 per cent of the population and men 47.2 per cent.

It is hard to get a fully reliable figure for Georgia's population. The state statistical department points out that it was only able to do a proper survey in territory that is currently under the political control of the Georgian government. Officials did estimate population numbers for the unrecognised republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which broke away from Georgia in the 1990s, but only through "alternative sources of information."

Sociologists point out that most migrants leave the country looking for work and many of them would like to return at some point.

[...]

The first wave of emigrants to leave independent Georgia did so mainly

between 1993 and 1995. They mainly came from the country's ethnic minorities and left for their "historical homelands," meaning Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Greece, Israel and Germany.

The second big wave of emigration began in 1999, and this time those leaving were mainly Georgians. The experts suggest that these people had waited for 10 years for their lives to improve, but their had finally run out of patience.

Russia remains the main destination for migrants, with up to 750,000 Georgians believed to be living there now. It is a natural place for them to go - it is a country they know well, which has higher living standards, and a language they understand. However, many Georgians work in Russia either semi-legally or illegally for lower than average wages. Some are victims of illegal people trafficking.

A recent damning report on Georgia by the International Organization for Migration, entitled "Hardship Abroad or Hunger", concludes that, "This study has clearly demonstrated that irregular migration from Georgia is substantial and that trafficking in Georgian citizens is a serious problem."

The report suggests government corruption is fuelling much of the illegal migration.

"The government of Georgia has so far made only limited steps in trying to restrict irregular migration and suppress trafficking," the IOM report declares. "Some analysts claim that certain government officials have vested financial interests in the operation of tourism firms and employment mediators, which could serve as an explanation of why irregular migration can still operate with virtual impunity."

[...]

Another class of emigrants consists of young Georgian men, who go abroad to escape two years' military service in the country's miserable and underfed armed forces.

[...]

Migration official Tamaz Gugushvili is blunt. "Georgia is on the brink of a demographic catastrophe," he said. "The government prefers to give the most implausible arguments to explain the dramatic fall in the number of citizens, rather than admit to its own incompetence. And that's the reason that there was a 13-year gap since the last census."

Lyudmila Rayeva is a freelance journalist based in Tbilisi.

INFORMATION

Our E-Mail :

Notre E-Mail :

htchoboiancovcas@compuserve.com