

Covcas Bulletin

Conflits et Droits de l'Homme au Caucase
Conflicts & Human Rights in the Caucasus

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Covcas Bulletin is the monthly and bilingual (English/French) publication of Covcas Center for Conflict Resolution and Human Rights.

Its purpose is to alert the international community about early warning news on Human Rights in the Caucasus region.

All financial contributions would be appreciated to help spread information on Human Rights. Covcas Bulletin is available by electronic mail. Please see details on the last page.

NOTE DE L'EDITEUR

Covcas Bulletin est la publication mensuelle et bilingue (Anglais/Français) du Centre Covcas pour la Résolution des conflits et les Droits de l'Homme.

Sa mission est de porter à l'attention de la Communauté Internationale les informations de pré-alerte sur les Droits de l'Homme au Caucase.

Votre participation financière nous permettra de poursuivre l'action de diffusion des informations. Voir modalités en dernière page de ce numéro.

SUMMARY NOTES

Media Freedom

Azerbaijan : pressures and state control upon media.

On 21 November, journalists and editors staged pickets denouncing the growing government pressures on the members of media and the persisting state censorship, as well as the harassments in the form of lawsuits against journalists.

Although censorship is formally abolished in Azerbaijan since 1998, the law enforcement agencies keep on censoring the media. It is reported that lawsuits initiated against journalists during October and November of this year exceed the number of all lawsuits against media representatives recorded during the first nine months of the year. Furthermore, journalists point out that the courts in the country, while claiming to be independent, have yet to pass a judgment in their favor in lawsuits filed by officials of the government.

Earlier in the month, and in response to pressures by the

Council of Europe and other international organizations aiming to promote a more open legal environment for the independent media, President Aliev signed a decree creating of a regulatory commission to remedy the situation. However, experts were fast to criticize the autocratic nature of this measure expressing fear that, far from being an effective solution to the problem of government interference in the media, this commission would, indeed, control the broadcast media by controlling the licenses. On the other hand, the Council of Europe strongly criticized the government's plan of adding a new public broadcaster to the state television stressing that this system would nor be financially viable for Azerbaijan and neither credible for the International Community. This criticisms should prompt the Parliament to rewrite the law thus addressing the concerns of many advocates of open media.

Minorities' Rights : Early Warning

Javakhk (Georgia): The Russian military base a guarantee of security for the ethnic Armenian population.?

Tensions between Armenians and Georgians in the city of Akhalsikha in Javakhk (Georgia's ethnically Armenian region) turned into clashes in early November. Ethnic Georgian criminal gangs in the city are blamed for deliberately creating an atmosphere of insecurity within the city's Armenian population forcing the Armenians to flee the region leaving behind their ancestral homes. The city – once predominantly populated by Armenians -- has progressively lost its Armenian inhabitants due to such

uncontrolled harassments and economic hardships that the Georgian authorities still fail to address.

On another front, Virk, a predominantly-Armenian local grass-roots organization, lodged a protest before the Georgian government organizers of an OSCE/UN-sponsored forum which was devoted to the pressing development needs of the Javakhk (Javakheti) region. Being a principal advocate for the region's majority Armenian population, Virk expressed concern about its exclusion from the forum. Its spokesmen claimed that the Georgian authorities pursue the deliberate policy of excluding the local population from taking part in the debate regarding Javakhk's social and economic problems thus inevitably leading to tension and mistrust.

Furthermore, a leader of the Javakhk National Movement expressed concern that the closure of the Russian military base in the city of Akhalkalak would deprive the Armenian households of much needed economic security. In fact, Georgia's efforts to gain membership in NATO raises serious fears among the Javakhk Armenians of a possible entry of Turkey's armed forces in the region. The region has painful memories of Turkish occupation of recent past involving mistreatment and massacres.

Humanitarian

Russia :

Deteriorating humanitarian conditions for Chechen refugees; anti-Chechen backlash in retaliation for terrorist attacks

The UN appealed for international donors to provide food and other assistance in support of Chechen refugees in Chechnya and in neighboring Russian republics. It was reported that supplies of the World Food Program are expected to run out by the end of the year 2002. The condition of the refugees is considered particularly worrisome in Ingushetia due to military measures by the Russian authorities in response to the recent terrorist operation at a Moscow theater.

In Moscow and in other parts of Russia, incidents of harassment of Chechen residents led human rights advocacy groups to express concern about the increase of anti-Chechen sentiment and the consequent violations of constitutional norms. Members of the committee planning to organize an international peace conference on Chechnya openly criticized President Putin's unwillingness to hold peace talks with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, as well as his proposal to hold a referendum for a new constitution in Chechnya in early 2003.

Racist Acts of Violences:

Krasnodar (Russia):

Local police refuses to open a criminal case in the Armenian church blast

Continuing numerous violent anti-Armenian incidents of this year, an explosion damaged, on 11 November, the historic Armenian church of the city of Krasnodar in Southern Russia. Despite the serious implications of this violent act, however, the local police refused to open a criminal case.

By the same token, the Police effectively masterminded the second postponement of the court hearings of nine young people accused of destruction of over 30 Armenian graves in the Slavonic cemetery of the city, which took place in April of this year. As a result, serious disappointment and concerns are expressed by the local population about the assurances given recently by Governor Alexander Tkachov (of the Krasnodar region) to the President of Armenia that he will put an end to such attacks.

RESUMES

Liberté de la presse

Azerbaïdjan : pressions et contrôle d'état sur la presse

Le 21 novembre, des journalistes et éditeurs ont manifesté à Bakou, dénonçant des pressions croissantes sur les journalistes et les médias, ainsi que la censure persistante et des poursuites judiciaires contre les journalistes. Bien que la censure soit abolie en Azerbaïdjan depuis 1998, les organes judiciaires continuent de censurer les médias. Les poursuites contre les journalistes durant les mois d'octobre et de novembre ont excédé en nombre ceux des premiers mois de l'année. Quelque temps avant et suite aux pressions du Conseil de l'Europe et d'autres organisations internationales pour créer un cadre légal plus ouvert pour des médias internationaux, le Président Aliiev a signé un décret pour la création d'une commission de régulation. Les experts ont critiqué la nature autocratique de cette mesure craignant de voir cette commission contrôler la diffusion médiatique en contrôlant les licences. Le Conseil de l'Europe a critiqué le plan précédent du gouvernement d'ajouter à la TV d'état une nouvelle télévision publique, soulignant que ce dédoublement ne serait ni financièrement viable, ni crédible aux yeux de la Communauté Internationale. Ces critiques devraient inciter le parlement à réécrire la loi en tenant compte des préoccupations d'un média libre.

Droits des minorités : pré-alerte

Djavakhk (Géorgie) : La base militaire russe une garantie de sécurité pour la population arménienne ?

Des tensions entre Arméniens et Géorgiens à Akhaltsikha ont tourné en affrontements début novembre. Les groupes criminels locaux sont accusés de créer un climat d'insécurité dans la population arménienne locale dont le nombre a régulièrement diminué en raison de la crise économique que les

autorités géorgiennes continuent de négliger.

A noter également que Virk, une organisation de la population majoritaire arménienne a protesté contre l'exclusion de ses représentants d'un forum sur les programmes de développement de la région de Javakheti organisé par l'OSCE et l'ONU. Les représentants arméniens ont annoncé que les tentatives des autorités géorgiennes d'exclure la population locale de l'examen de leurs problèmes économiques et sociaux sont à l'origine des tensions et de la méfiance.

Un dirigeant du Mouvement National "Djavakhk" a fait part de ses craintes de voir la fermeture de la base militaire russe d'Akhalkalak priver les Arméniens de garanties de leur sécurité. En fait, les efforts géorgiens d'adhérer à l'OTAN ravivent la peur qu'une entrée possible des forces armées turques dans la région se solderait par des massacres comme cela s'était produit plusieurs fois dans le passé.

Humanitaire

Tchéchénie : Conditions humanitaires des réfugiés en détérioration ; représailles anti-tchéchénes après les attaques terroristes

L'ONU fait appel aux donateurs internationaux de procurer des aliments et d'autres aides aux réfugiés en Tchétchénie et dans les républiques russes voisines puisque les réserves fournies par le Programme Alimentaire Mondiale seront épuisées avant janvier 2003. La situation des réfugiés se détériore surtout en Ingouchie en raison des mesures militaires prises par les autorités russes à la suite de l'attaque terroriste dans un théâtre moscovite.

A Moscou et ailleurs en Russie, des cas de harcèlement de Tchétchénes ont fait réagir des groupes de défense des Droits de l'Homme contre la généralisation du sentiment anti tchéchéne et les violations des normes constitutionnelles. Des membres du Comité Pour l'Organisation d'une Conférence de Paix sur la Tchétchénie ont critiqué à la fois le refus du Président Putin de discuter avec le Président tchéchéne Aslan

Maskhadov, et sa proposition d'organiser un référendum sur une nouvelle constitution en Tchétchénie début de 2003.

Violences racistes :

Krasnodar : La police locale refuse d'ouvrir une enquête judiciaire sur l'explosion contre l'Eglise arménienne

Après les violences anti-arméniennes de cette année, une nouvelle explosion dans la ville de Krasnodar a endommagé l'église arménienne le 11 novembre. Curieusement, la police locale a refusé d'ouvrir une enquête judiciaire sur l'explosion.

Cette attitude de la Police, ajoutée au second report des auditions de neuf jeunes hommes accusés de la destruction d'une trentaine de tombes arméniennes en avril dernier dans le cimetière slavons de la ville, soulève de nouvelles inquiétudes dans la population quant à la promesse donnée récemment au Président arménien par le gouverneur de Krasnodar, Alexandre Tkatchev, de mettre fin aux attaques.

DEVELOPPING EVENTS / REVUE DE PRESSE

AZERBAIJAN / AZERBAIDJAN

11/04/02 – U.S. steps up pressure on Azerbaijan over corruption - RFE/RL

Caucasus Press on 2 November quoted U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Ross Wilson as saying that if Azerbaijan had used the considerable amounts of financial aid it has received from the United States for the purposes for which it was intended, the country would long since have become the most developed state in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Wilson reportedly implied that the money has been embezzled and that Washington might therefore withhold further aid. Speaking on 25 October at the presentation of Azerbaijan's new antipoverity program, Wilson reportedly called on the Azerbaijani leadership to "speed up the struggle against

corruption...and tackle corrupt officials who exploit state property".(.../...)

He had told an event in Baku a few months ago that "corruption had become part of normal life in Azerbaijan," the daily says. "This is indicative of the fact that the West, which is interested in the establishment of a democratic society and the implementation of reforms that meet the requirements of a market economy in Azerbaijan, no longer trusts the promises Aliyev gives in closed door meetings."(...)

11/06/02 – Mine-clearing agency says over 35 areas mined in Azerbaijan - Azadinform news agency

Azerbaijan is among 90 countries with mined areas, the Azerbaijani National Mine-Clearing Agency (ANAMA) has told Azadinform news agency. ANAMA says that over 35 Azerbaijani regions and towns are mined. These are mostly districts occupied during the war with Armenia, as well as areas located in the vicinity of former Soviet military bases. The agency says that research is currently being conducted among the population in these settlements on how mines pose a threat to the solution of socioeconomic problems in these areas.

11/07/02 - Azerbaijan's New Broadcasting Laws Under Attack - Eurasianet - Transitions on Line (

(.../...)Authorities, in the run-up to the 2003 presidential elections, came under pressure from the Council of Europe and other international organizations to create a more open legal framework for independent media. Azeri President Heidar Aliyev accordingly endorsed proposals on 11 October from the National Television and Radio Council that would harmonize Azerbaijan's media standards with the Council of Europe's requirements.

Already, Aliyev has signed a decree on the creation of a regulatory commission and parliament is discussing a separate law that would make state television into public television, that would still receive funding but not directly from the government.

(...)Critics express concern about the autocratic nature of the new media measures. (...) Some experts fear that the Broadcasting

Commission would essentially control the broadcast media by controlling the licensing process.(...)International organizations agreed.(.../...)

The Council of Europe delegation declared its opposition to the government's initial plan of keeping state television intact and simply adding a new public broadcaster to the media roster.(...) "Keeping two separate organizations would not be financially viable for Azerbaijan ... and [the system] would never possess international credibility or the Council of Europe's approval."

If authorities accept this argument, Azeri lawmakers will have to rewrite the broadcasting law to remove references to state television. Some open-media advocates hope authorities follow this course, as rewriting the law and the decree on broadcasting could prompt the parliament and the president to address the concerns raised by the Council of Europe and others. The influence of the presidential party on the Broadcasting Commission could be limited by reserving some seats on the commission for academics, religious, and community leaders.(...)

11/12/02 - Georgia's Azerbaijani minority protests repeated violent attacks... - RFE/RL

Representatives of the overwhelmingly Azerbaijani population of Georgia's Gardabani Raion southeast of Tbilisi staged a protest outside the local government building to protest recent armed assaults (...). On 11 November, a group of armed masked men, some of them wearing paramilitary uniforms, halted a car carrying three Azerbaijanis and opened fire on them when they tried to resist. Alibaly Askerov, who heads the Georgia-Azerbaijan Friendship Society, said he does not believe that and earlier violent attacks on Azerbaijanis were ethnically motivated. He attributed them to numerous illegal groups engaged in extortion and racketeering.

11/14/02 - Armenians, Georgians, Azeris debate human rights problems in Armenian capital - Public Television of Armenia

An international conference on the topic of "Human rights protection as a basis for interethnic accord" has been held in Yerevan. Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian

sociologists, human rights champions, NGOs and journalists attended the conference. Such meetings are becoming routine among representatives of the Caucasus republics. The aim of the conference is to urge the conflicting sides to hold an open and fair dialogue and discussions and to inform our societies about their scientific achievements. The sides are confident that the three Caucasus leaders and members of the parliaments will take into consideration the issues and the ways to solve problems which were discussed at the conference during their official meetings.(...)

11/15/02 - Azerbaijani villagers renew demonstrations over poor living conditions - RFE/RL

Residents of Azerbaijan's Nardaran village on 14 November renewed demonstrations protesting the government's failure to address the severe socioeconomic conditions of the region (...). The situation in Nardaran remains tense despite several meetings with government officials in the wake of a clash between villagers and police in early June. Village elders condemned the authorities for not fulfilling their promises of economic aid and energy supplies and called for the release of all villagers detained after the 3 June clash. The Situation in Nardaran has been simmering for many months, as villagers launched a series of protests and demonstrations against poor socioeconomic conditions in early 2002.

11/19/02 - Azerbaijan, Armenia exchange POWs - Turan news agency

Two prisoners of war were exchanged on the border between Tavush (Armenia) and Qazax (Azerbaijan) Districts today, the ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross Baku office has told Turan. The Azerbaijani state commission for prisoners of war, hostages and missing persons reported that the Azerbaijani side had released Garik Borisovich Saakyan and the Armenian side had released Ilham Yusif oglu Mammadov. (...)

11/19/02 - Azerbaijan becomes NATO associate member - Speaker - Bilik Dunyasi news agency

Azerbaijan has become an associate member of NATO. This was stated today by Parliament Speaker Murtuz Alasgarov. He said he had received the news from Turkey, where a regular session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly was under way. Deputy Chairman of the Milli Maclis Azerbaijani parliament Ziyafat Asgarov and MP Musa Musayev are attending the session.(...)

11/22/02 - Peacekeepers Head To Afghanistan With U.S. Financial Backing - RFE/RL

On 19 November Azerbaijan sent 28 soldiers, one ensign, and one officer to Afghanistan to participate in the peacekeeping mission. They will work under the command of the Turkish armed forces. The United States has agreed to provide about \$1 million to finance the participation of Azerbaijani peacekeepers in the antiterrorism operation in Afghanistan.

This is not the first time Azerbaijani soldiers have been on a peacekeeping mission abroad. Soldiers of Azerbaijan have served in Kosovo -- also under Turkish military command.(...)

11/22/02 - Journalists Call On Government To Stop Pressuring Media - RFE/RL Azerbaijan Report

On 21 November the Editors' Union, which reconvened its meeting committee last month, staged a picket in front of the Supreme Court. The demonstrators, who shouted slogans such as "stop pressuring the media," and "restore newsstands of the Gaya distribution network," among others, demanded that the Supreme Court justly try the cases against the media.

Rovshen Hajiev, editor in chief of the opposition newspaper "Azadlig," was the fist to speak. He said that to date "independent" courts have never passed judgment in favor of journalists. In other words, the media has almost never won lawsuits filed against them by officials.

Ganimet Zahidov, the head of the "Azad Soz" (Free Word) Journalists' Union, noted that although censorship in Azerbaijan was officially abolished in 1998, the law-enforcement bodies of Azerbaijan, including the courts, are censoring the media. This allegation was

included in the resolution statement of the protest.

Under the resolution prepared by the "Ruh" Journalist Defense Committee... The demonstrators also called for the repeal of court rulings that resulted in the closing and fining of a number of media outlets, for just and equitable lawsuits against media representatives, as well as an end of pressure against the media.

On 12 December the Editors' Union intends to hold an open rally in Baku to protest the pressures on the mass media.

11/25/02 – Azerbaijani opposition calls on President to resign - RFE/RL

Four influential Azerbaijani opposition groups -- the Musavat, National Independence, and Democratic parties and the progressive wing of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party -- organized a march and demonstration in Baku on 24 November, during which participants demanded President Aliiev's resignation; the creation of conditions that will ensure next year's elections are free and fair; and an end to reprisals against inhabitants of the village of Nardaran on the outskirts of Baku, Interfax and Turan reported. Attendance at the rally, which was approved by the municipal authorities, was estimated by the police at between 1,000-2,000 and by the organizers at 30,000.

ARMENIA / ARMENIE

11/06/02 - USAID Announces Second Phase Of Armenia Housing Project

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) announced on Wednesday the start of the second, final stage of its large-scale housing program for northern Armenian regions still reeling from the devastating effects of the 1988 earthquake. Under an agreement signed with the Armenian government, the USAID will underwrite purchase of apartments and houses by an additional 3,000 local families that had lost their homes as a result of the disaster.

The entire program was estimated to cost \$15 million when it was launched last year. The U.S. Urban Institute, the main USAID contractor,

has already distributed 2,400 housing certificates to families living in metal shacks and other temporary shelters. Half of them have already bought new homes. (...)

11/06/02 – injured Armenia journalist released from hospital - RFE/RL

Mark Grigorian, who was injured in a grenade attack in Yerevan on 22 October (see "RFE/RL Newslite, 23 and 24 October 2002) was discharged from the hospital on 28 October, Noyan Tapan reported the following day. Officials at the Armenian Prosecutor-General's Office told RFE/RL on 29 October that they have questioned numerous witnesses in their investigation into Grigorian's attempted murder but ha ...

11/06/02 - Rustamyan Says Pro-Islamic Won't Change Policy On Armenia - Asbarez online top stories

"The victory of the pro-Islamic forces in elections revealed the true system of values in Turkey which is based on a traditionally aggressive ideology".

Arminfo

"Turkey's policy on Armenia will not seriously change following the victory of pro-Islamic forces in the country," said Armen Rustamyan, the deputy chairman of the National Assembly's standing commission on foreign relations, and a member of the Supreme Body of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF). He stressed, however, that Ankara's true goal was to divert the attention of the international community from the issue of recognizing the genocide of the Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1915-1922 and strengthen Ankara's influence in the South Caucasus region. Rustamyan said that in this context, the current Turkish authorities are continuing the policy of their predecessors.

Armenians repatriated from Turkmenistan

The International Organization for Migration has facilitated the return to Armenia of 113 Armenians, most of them from Syunik, who were constrained to leave Turkmenistan because they failed to comply with the new visa requirements, Noyan

Tapan reported on 25 November. The total number of Armenians living either legally or illegally in Turkmenistan is estimated at 40,000.

11/08/02 – US new congressional elections promoted strong Armenian lobby PanARMENIAN.Net

141 of the 149 Senate and House candidates endorsed by the Armenian American community won the US congressional elections. In the opinion of the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA), it will promote strong Armenian lobby in the US highest legislative body. According to the source, over 94% of the candidates endorsed in the House of Representatives and 92% of the Congressional Armenian Caucus won the elections. "We look forward to working with the new members of the 108th Congress on issues ranging from affirming the Armenian Genocide to strengthening Armenia and defending Nagorno Karabakh's right to self-determination within secure borders," - ANCA statement says.

11/11/02 - Turkish Election Winner Rules Out Softer Line On Armenia - RFE/RL

A leader of a Turkish party with Islamist roots that swept to power in November 3 general elections indicated on Monday that it will not reconsider Turkey's tough stance against neighboring Armenia and will continue to give full support to Azerbaijan.

"We are trying to keep good relations with Armenia and other countries. But Turkey is not willing to sacrifice them and jeopardize its relations with Azerbaijan and other Central Asian countries," Abdulatif Siner, deputy chairman of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), told an RFE/RL correspondent in Ankara.

"The Turkish people are especially sensitive to the situation in Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan has some expectations from Turkey," Siner said, alluding to Baku's strong opposition to the normalization of Turkish-Armenian relations until a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Successive governments in Ankara have consistently stuck to that line

out of solidarity with their Turkic-speaking Caucasus ally, refusing to establish diplomatic relations with Yerevan. Siner's remarks suggest that this policy will not change under the new Turkish cabinet, which the AKP is currently forming single-handedly.

Siner argued that despite "long historical and cultural ties" with Armenia, Turkey must be primarily guided by its national interests. "We believe that we should have good relations with all countries," he said. "It means our foreign policy shouldn't be based on animosity. Normal relations should continue, but each country should follow the policy which serves its national purposes."

(...)

11/25/02 - Armenia to fulfil commitments for democratic elections - US experts - Noyan Tapan news agency

"The history of elections accompanied by violations continues to leave its mark on Armenia. The country is yet to fulfil its commitments to hold democratic elections," members of a delegation of the US National Democratic Institute (NDI) told a press conference on 23 November. They had arrived in Armenia to study the political situation in the country in the run-up to the elections.

Members of the US NDI delegation said that given such problems, the government and persons responsible for the electoral processes are required to make major efforts in order to ensure that the 2003 elections will be held on the proper level. At the same time, the members of the delegation believe that political parties and candidates should join their efforts and resolutely act against illegalities, including among their own ranks.

11/25/02- Armenia president accuses Azerbaijan of backtracking on Karabakh - RFE/RL

Robert Kocharian said in his address to the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council session in Prague on 22 November that Azerbaijan subsequently rejected a settlement of the Karabakh conflict

that the two sides agreed on during talks last year in Paris and Florida, Noyan Tapan and RFE/RL's Yerevan bureau reported. Had Baku not done so, "we would have already been halfway through ...

11/27/02 - Armenia prefers Russia over NATO ties: defense minister - Agence France Presse

Armenia is in no hurry to join NATO and is keen to preserve strong military ties with Russia, Defense Minister Serge Sarkisian said Wednesday, a week after neighboring Georgia officially applied for alliance membership. Yerevan is Moscow's closest ally in the Caucasus region, and in October signed with Russia a new agreement on the joint use of Armenian military facilities, particularly the Gunri base in northwestern Armenia. However, Armenia, a former Soviet republic, is also a member of NATO's Partnership for peace program for non-alliance members.

11/28/02 - ArmTV

The debates with the Israeli government over the Paron Ter district that belongs to the Armenian 'patriarchy, which lasted seven months, ended in finding a solution. As a result of the long negotiations between Israeli ministry of defense and the Patriarchy, the ministry dropped its plans to annex Paron Ter district for building security wall between Jerusalem and Bethlehem and recognized Patriarchy's exclusive rights over the district. Moreover, Israeli government agreed to reimburse the damage done to the district and the church.

11/28/02 - ArmTV

The chairman of the European Commission Romano Prody declared that it would be possible to speak about the start date of negotiations about Armenian membership in the European Union, 'provided that appropriate political conditions exist, most of which are about de'mocracy and human rights'. In response to the question asking whether the European Union perceives Armenia as a stable partner in the Southern Caucasus, Romano Prody said that all democratic countries are their good partners. 'The new democratic countries must make the first steps and gradually learn, while our task is

to assist them in moving in correct direction' ` stated the chairman of the European Commission.

11/29/02 - Pan-Armenian Fund Raises \$5 Mln. For Major Karabakh Road

The Diaspora-led All-Armenian Hayastan Fund has secured more than \$5 million in donation pledges at its annual televised fundraiser in support of an ambitious plan to link the northern and southern parts of Nagorno-Karabakh with a modern highway, fund officials said Friday.

They said the money collected during Thursday's "telethon" broadcast live from Los Angeles to Armenia and major Armenian communities abroad will enable Hayastan to complete half of the \$25 million project.

Work on the 170-kilometer road, described by Armenian officials as Karabakh's future transport "backbone," began in 2000. Several of its sections with the total length of some 40 kilometers have already been built and are now open for traffic.

GEORGIA / GEORGIE

11/01/02 - Georgian opposition remains divided over President's impeachment - RFE/RL

Several prominent Georgian opposition parties have declined to support the Revival Union's campaign to impeach President Eduard Shevardnadze. The Labor Party expressed support for the initiative on 30 October, Caucasus Press reported. But "Alia" on 31 October quoted Socialist Party leader Vakhtang Rcheulishvili as saying he will not do so, as Shevardnadze is the only person who can solve Georgia's current problems. Giorgi Baramidze, one of the leaders of the United Democrats, similarly told Caucasus Press that that party views both Shevardnadze and Revival Union leader Aslan Abashidze as posing an equal threat to political stability in Georgia. On 1 November, Caucasus Press cited "Rezonansi" as reporting that Abashidze is currently in Tbilisi holding meetings with other opposition parties in a bid to drum up support for Shevardnadze's impeachment.

11/04/02 – Georgian oppositionists in fight at CEC HQ - RFE/RL

Some 50 members of the opposition New National Movement (AEM) headed by former Justice Minister Mikhail Saakashvili, some of them reportedly armed, on 1 November forced their way into the building housing the Central Election Commission to protest that body's delay in announcing the results of the recount of votes cast in Tbilisi in the 2 June local elections, Caucasus Press reported. On 31 October, Saakashvili told the independent television station Rustavi-2 that the leaders of the Adjara Autonomous Republic had paid a huge bribe to unnamed CEC members. They engaged in a fight with guards employed by the Abkhaz parliament-in-exile, which has its premises in the same building, causing considerable material damage. The military prosecutor's office has opened a criminal case in connection with the fracas. On 2 November, Kote Kemularia, who is a member of the AEM leadership, blamed the guards -- who he claimed were drunk -- for trying to prevent the AEM delegation from entering the building although they had passes permitting them to do so.

11/11/02 - Russia should comply with the decision of the 1999 OSCE summit and close down its military bases in Georgia as required by the Treaty on Conventional Weapons in Europe, Deputy Defence Minister Gela Bezhushvili has told Prime-News. - Prime-News news agency

"Georgia will not change its stand on this issue," Bezhushvili said. If Russia keeps procrastinating at the talks on the closure of the Akhalkalaki and Batumi bases, the Georgian side will be fully entitled to refuse the Russian troops permission to be temporarily stationed in the country, and this is the prevailing opinion at the Georgian Defence Ministry, Bezhushvili said.

In such a case, Georgia will demand that Russia close its bases forthwith, he added. Russia maintains that closure of the bases would take 11 years, while Georgia only agrees to three years.

It has been long time since the talks on the issue were discontinued. According to Russian media reports, the Russian General Staff will attempt to review the Treaty on Conventional Weapons in Europe, as Moscow fears that otherwise, the territory of the new NATO member countries might become exempt from the treaty provisions and accumulate large numbers of weapons.

The Russian General Staff also maintains that the treaty makes it impossible for Russia to accumulate military forces in the South Caucasus and thus respond appropriately to NATO's eastward expansion.

The possibility to review the treaty is a key factor that would enable Russia to oppose the NATO expansion militarily.

Russia is suspicious that as the Baltic states become NATO members, the alliance will set up its bases there and concentrate armoured vehicles and the air force, Yuriy Baluyevskiy, first deputy chief of the Russian General Staff, has said.

11/12/02 – Georgia's Azerbaijani minority protests repeated violent attacks... - RFE/RL

Representatives of the overwhelmingly Azerbaijani population of Georgia's Gardabani Raion southeast of Tbilisi staged a protest on 11 November outside the local government building to protest recent armed assaults, Caucasus Press and zerkalo.az reported on 12 November. On 11 November, a group of armed masked men, some of them wearing paramilitary uniforms, halted a car carrying three Azerbaijanis and opened fire on them when they tried to resist.

Alibaly Askerov, who heads the Georgia-Azerbaijan Friendship Society, said he does not believe that and earlier violent attacks on Azerbaijanis were ethnically motivated. He attributed them to numerous illegal groups engaged in extortion and racketeering.

11/14/02 – Powers of Georgian anticorruption body expanded - RFE/RL

With the backing of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, the governmental body empowered to combat corruption was granted new powers on 13 November,

Civil Georgia reported. The secretary of the Anticorruption Council, Kakha Ugulava, reported that the new powers include the ability to investigate the tax returns of government officials. State Minister Avtandil Djorbenadze opposed the move, arguing that the powers could be used for political attacks against senior officials.

11/14/02 – Georgian opposition politician takes control of Tbilisi city council - RFE/RL

Exasperated by the Central Election Commission's foot-dragging in the recount of votes cast in Tbilisi during the 2 June local elections, on 4 November representatives of the National Movement-Democratic Front (EMDP) headed by former Justice Minister Mikhail Saakashvili convened in the Georgian parliament and elected Saakashvili to head the Tbilisi municipal council.

According to official returns, the EMDP polled a close second in Tbilisi, garnering 23.7 percent of the vote and 14 of the 49 seats on the municipal council, compared with 25.4 percent and 15 seats for the Labor Party. The Labor Party nonetheless backed Saakashvili's candidacy for municipal-council chairman in the hope that his popularity would rapidly erode when it became clear that he could not deliver on pre-election promises.

But other parliamentary deputies denounced Saakashvili's election as municipal-council chairman as illegal and unethical. Giorgi Targamadze, who heads the Revival Union-21st Century three-person faction within the city council, demanded that all parliamentary deputies who participated in the ballot be suspended. On 5 November, Socialist Party Chairman Vakhtang Rcheulishvili criticized the Georgian authorities for failing to prevent Saakashvili's election and publicly branded the former minister "a madman and a fascist," thereby provoking a mass brawl in which some 60 deputies were involved. On 6 November, responding to a suit filed by the Socialist Party, the Tbilisi City Court suspended the functioning of the city council.

In addition, Saakashvili's election may have sabotaged earlier efforts to create an opposition front against Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze that would unite the

EMDP, former parliamentary speaker Zurab Zhvania's United Democrats (whose city-council deputies voted for Saakashvili), and the "New Rightists," whose candidate, Levan Gachechiladze, was the only alternative candidate for municipal-council chairman, according to a "Eurasia View" analysis of 13 November.

In mid-June, Saakashvili told Caucasus Press that if elected municipal-council chairman he would quit parliament to devote himself full-time to municipal politics. If he now makes good on that pledge, he will find himself, as "Nezavisimaya gazeta" pointed out on 6 November, in permanent confrontation with Tbilisi Mayor Vano Zodelava, who is a longtime Shevardnadze associate. (The EMDP campaigned in Tbilisi for the June ballot under the slogan "Tbilisi without Shevardnadze.")

Recent opinion polls suggest that if mayoral elections were held this month, Zodelava would retain his post. In one such poll, 24.6 percent of respondents said they would vote for him, compared with only 14.1 percent for Saakashvili, while a second poll gave the two men 18.3 percent and 4.6 percent of the vote, respectively. (Liz Fuller)

11/20/02 – Georgia seeks to delay repatriation of Meskhetians - RFE/RL

Speaking in Tbilisi on 19 November after meeting with visiting OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Rolf Ekeus, Georgian Minister of State Avtandil Djorbenadze appealed to the OSCE and the Council of Europe to extend the 2011 deadline for the return to southern Georgia of Meskhetians and their descendants deported from the region by Joseph Stalin in 1944, Caucasus Press reported. The repatriation was one of the conditions for Georgia's admission to the Council of Europe. Djorbenadze said allowing the Meskhetians to return before Georgia's territorial integrity has been restored would create new problems for Georgia.

11/21/02 – Georgian President confirms he will formally request NATO membership - RFE/RL

Speaking on 21 November at RFE/RL's Prague headquarters,

Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze again said that he will make a formal request on 22 November at the current NATO summit that Georgia be accepted as a member of NATO. But he avoided giving any indication of when Georgia might join the alliance, saying only that it will take "not one year and not two." Shevardnadze listed as the two greatest obstacles to joining NATO Georgia's economic weakness and the unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Asked whether the presence on Georgian territory of two Russian military bases also constitutes an obstacle, Shevardnadze noted that Moscow has pledged to close those bases. But he added the Georgian leadership acknowledges that doing so will involve considerable expense for Russia, and that "we have to be realists." He nonetheless concluded that the Russians must leave. "There is no other alternative," he said.

11/22/02 – Georgian parliament votes to tax Russian military bases - RFE/RL

Deputies voted on 21 November to ratify a resolution drafted two days earlier by the parliament's Defense and Security Committee that would require the Russian military bases located on Georgian territory to pay land taxes, Caucasus Press reported. The resolution is retroactive dating back to the collapse of the USSR in December 1991. Committee Chairman rakli Batiashvili told fellow deputies on 21 November that if Russia refuses to pay the taxes, they will be deducted from Georgia's \$170 million debt to Russia. Interfax, however, on 21 November quoted a spokesman for the Russian military contingent in Georgia as saying any decision to impose taxes on the Russian bases is premature as their status has not been legally defined. An agreement on the Russian military presence in Georgia concluded in 1995 has not yet been ratified by either country's parliament.

11/25/02 – Georgian opposition politician accuses authorities - RFE/RL

Addressing the Georgian parliament on 22 November, former Communist Party First Secretary Djumber Patiashvili, who currently heads the Unity Party, accused the authorities

of seeking to infiltrate opposition parties under the guise of combating terrorism, according to Caucasus Press and Rustavi-2 Television as cited by Groong. Patiashvili produced a 24-page classified document he claimed was drafted by the National Security Ministry and which called for infiltrating Unity, Mikhail Saakashvili's National Movement, supporters of former President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the Georgian Orthodox Church, and Georgia's Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities. Those measures, Patiashvili said, violate the Georgian Constitution. National Security Minister Valeri Khaburzanidze told deputies the document was drafted by one of his subordinates who was subsequently dismissed and that he had refused to endorse it. A similar document naming Patiashvili was leaked to parliament two months ago.

ABKHAZIA / ABKHAZIE

11/05/02 – Georgian President not impressed by proposal to resolve Abkhaz conflict... -RFE/RL

At his traditional Monday press briefing, Eduard Shevardnadze said on 4 November that he strongly disapproves of several points of the plan for resolving the Abkhaz conflict proposed by Adjar State Council Chairman Aslan Abashidze, Caucasus Press reported. Shevardnadze named Abashidze his special envoy for the Abkhaz conflict one year ago. As summarized in the Georgian press on 5 November, Abashidze's proposal envisages lifting the economic blockade of Abkhazia imposed by the CIS in 1996; opening rail, road, air, and sea communications between Abkhazia and the CIS; restoration of the Inguri hydroelectric-power station, which is located on Abkhaz territory but provides power for other regions of Georgia; and exporting gas and electricity via Abkhazia to Turkey, according to Caucasus Press. Shevardnadze said he plans to discuss the proposal with Abashidze but has the impression that the latter is not yet ready for such a discussion. Also on 4 November, Shevardnadze met in Tbilisi with UN Special Envoy for Abkhazia Heidi Tagliavini to discuss the UN-drafted alternative formula for resolving the Abkhaz conflict, Caucasus Press reported.

11/07/02 – Has Russian-Georgian proxy war shifted from Pankisi to Abkhazia ? - RFE/RL

Another unanswered question in the wake of the Moscow hostage taking is: Why did the Russian leadership (in contrast to individual Russian media outlets) choose not to try to implicate Georgia by claiming that Movsar Baraev and his accomplices planned the attack from a base in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge? After all, with most of the hostage takers dead and the few survivors under lock and key, it would not be easy for the Georgian leadership to refute such claims.

It appears, however, that, at least for the moment, Russia has switched tactics and is again using Abkhazia as its preferred means of exerting pressure on the Georgian leadership. Georgian Foreign Ministry spokesman Kakha Sikharulidze told Caucasus Press on 1 November that Moscow has withdrawn its approval of the document drafted by former UN special envoy Dieter Boden titled "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi." Consequently, Sikharulidze said, a 4 November meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the Abkhaz conflict has been postponed. Russia blocked approval of the Boden document by the Security Council for months last year but finally withdrew its objections in December 2001.

Tbilisi, meanwhile, has resurrected its earlier demand that the Russian peacekeeping force deployed under the CIS aegis in the Abkhaz conflict zone be either augmented with contingents from other countries or that its mandate be broadened to enable it to protect more effectively the Georgian population of Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion. Georgian National Security Council Secretary Tedo Djaparidze explained that the Georgian leadership will push to have the conflict zone in which the peacekeepers are deployed expanded to include the whole of Gali Raion and will also insist on the creation in Gali of a joint Abkhaz-Georgian administration and a joint police force. (Liz Fuller)

11/11/02 – UN official discusses Abkhazia with Georgian leadership - RFE/RL

Jean-Marie Guehenno, who is UN undersecretary-general for peacekeeping operations, met in Tbilisi on 9 November with Georgian State Minister Avtandil Djorbenadze to discuss prospects for resolving the Abkhaz conflict, Caucasus Press and Russian agencies reported. Guehenno told journalists he will make every effort to promote confidence-building measures and to persuade the Abkhaz leadership to accept as a basis for negotiations the so-called "Boden document" on the distribution of competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. He noted that augmenting the existing Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in the Abkhaz conflict zone with military contingents from other countries is possible only with the consent of both sides in the conflict. Georgia has consistently lobbied for an international peacekeeping force under the UN aegis. Guehenno also met on 9 November with the head of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz parliament-in-exile, Tamaz Nadareishvili, who again called for the UN to launch a peace-enforcement operation in Abkhazia, Caucasus Press reported.

11/13/02 – UN official calls for resumption of Abkhaz-Georgian talks... - RFE/RL

On the final day of his fact-finding mission to Georgia and Abkhazia, UN Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guehenno met separately in Tbilisi on 12 November with parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze and with President Eduard Shevardnadze, Caucasus Press and Russian news agencies reported. Burdjanadze reportedly complained that the UN has not done enough to promote a settlement of the conflict and called on the organization to pressure Russia to drop its double standard toward Georgia, by which she presumably meant that Russia has no right to deny Chechnya independence while tacitly supporting Abkhazia. She also pointed out that nine years after the end of the war, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Georgian authorities to convince Georgian displaced persons from Abkhazia that the conflict should be resolved

peacefully. Guehenno told journalists after his talks with Shevardnadze that he considers it imperative for Tbilisi and Sukhumi to begin talks on the so-called Boden document "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competencies Between Tbilisi and Sukhumi," which Abkhazia has previously rejected. A spokeswoman for Shevardnadze said that document gives Abkhazia "broad autonomy" within Georgia.

"Rezonansi" on 13 November quoted Belgian constitutional expert Bruno Coppieters as saying the document provides for a federative system with horizontal ties between the central government and those of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Caucasus Press reported.

11/19/02 – Georgian Presidential adviser discloses details of "boden document" - RFE/RL

The daily "Tribuna" on 18 November quoted Georgian presidential adviser on international law Levan Aleksidze as saying the UN-drafted document "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Responsibilities between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" defines Georgia as a sovereign state and Abkhazia as a sovereign entity within -- and an integral part of -- Georgia. The extent of Abkhazia's sovereignty is to be decided during further talks between Georgian and Abkhaz officials. The Abkhaz leadership has consistently refused to accept the so-called Boden document as a basis for negotiations, arguing that the unrecognized republic's population voted in a referendum three years ago to endorse the article of the constitution defining Abkhazia as an independent sovereign state.

11/27/02 – Abkhaz Premier, Russian envoy meet - RFE/RL

Russian First Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loshchinin, who is President Vladimir Putin's special representative for the Abkhaz conflict, said in Moscow after talks with Abkhaz Prime Minister Anri Djergenia that it is in the interests of both Abkhazia and Georgia that Abkhazia be represented at an upcoming UN Security Council session at which the Abkhaz conflict is to be discussed and be allowed to outline its views on resolving the conflict, Caucasus Press reported on 27 November But President

Shevardnadze said he doubts the Security Council will invite Abkhaz representatives to address the session. Meanwhile Djemal Gamakharia (Revival Union) told a session of the Georgian parliament commission on Abkhazia on 26 November that he has documentary proof that Moscow is resettling 5,000 Cossacks from the Urals in Abkhazia, Caucasus Press reported.

NORTH OSSETIA / OSSETIE DU NORD

11/19/02 - Officer reportedly sold soldier into slavery - RFE/RL

An unidentified officer of the 503rd Motorized Infantry Regiment deployed in Vladikavkaz allegedly sold Sergeant Mikhail Fedorov into slavery in 1999 (...), the officer sent Fedorov to do manual labor for a private businessman near the unit's base in the summer of 1999. According to Fedorov, such agreements were common, with officers hiring out soldiers to locals for 100-500 rubles (\$3-15) a day. Fedorov said the man he was sent to work for then took away his documents and imprisoned him after the work was finished. He was later sent to another "owner" and changed bosses several times over the next three years, during which he performed manual labor in several villages in Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. During all this time, the Defense Ministry considered him a deserter. Eventually, Fedorov said, he was able to get a message to a Duma deputy who secured his release (...)

CHECHNYA / TCHETCHENIE

11/01/02 - Chechen NGO says it can disprove Russian claims of Maskhadov's involvement in hostage taking - RFE/RL

The Chechen Committee for National Salvation (ChKNS)(...) released a statement on 25 October rejecting as "an outrageous lie" claims by Federal Security Service (FSB) spokesman Sergei Ignatchenko and Deputy Interior Minister Vladimir Vasilev that Russian intelligence intercepted a videocassette that proves Maskhadov's complicity with the hostage takers (...). The statement

says the ChKNS is ready to furnish the media with proof that Maskhadov did not give the orders for the hostage taking. It further explains that on the videocassette in question Maskhadov merely informed foreign journalists that the Chechen armed forces are strong enough to undertake an action that would fundamentally change the course of the war and compel the Russian Army to withdraw from Chechnya.

11/01/02 - Basaev claims responsibility for Moscow hostage taking - RFE/RL

Field commander Shamil Basaev, whom Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov named to head his government's Military Committee in late June, has claimed responsibility for last week's hostage taking at a Moscow theater by Chechen militants (...). Basaev admitted the assault did not achieve its objective of ending the war and the "genocide of the Chechen people," but added that "next time we will send people who will not take hostages or make any demands. These people will simply destroy [our] enemies."

11/01/02 - Duma bans returning bodies of killed «terrorists» - RFE/RL

The Duma on 1 November passed in all three readings an amendment to the law on terrorism that authorizes the government to refuse to return the bodies of those killed during antiterrorism operations to their families. The amendment also allows the government to refuse to divulge to relatives where those killed have been buried. Corresponding amendments to the law on interment and burial were also adopted. If passed by the Federation Council and endorsed by the president, the amendments will apply to the Chechen fighters killed during last month's hostage crisis in Moscow.

11/06/02 - Anti-Chechen backlash in wake of hostage crisis - RFE/RL

(...) fears of an anti-Chechen backlash in retaliation for the terrorist attack began to materialize with a series of incidents involving harassment of Chechens in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia. (...) Human Rights Ombudsman Oleg Mironov expressed concern on 30

October about a likely increase in anti-Chechen sentiment and the subsequent activity of the military and security forces(...) "In Russia, there are enough ultra-patriots who are ready to defend the interests of Slavic people by exploding our country and casting it into the abyss of interethnic strife," Mironov said. He added that there are no legal grounds for expelling Chechens from Moscow or other regions and that the heightened security measures must not violate constitutional norms. (...) President Vladimir Putin said: "I have just been acquainted with the alarming information of the Interior Ministry about the increased threats against Chechens.... Under no circumstances can we allow this negative turn of events or give in to the provocations that are being pushed upon us. We do not have the right to permit injustice."

Meanwhile, local police precincts as well as some vandals appeared to be ignoring the presidential admonishment.

(...) Activists say that within hours of the storming of the music theater to rescue the hostages, police launched Operation Thunderstorm to sweep through the Chechen communities in Moscow and elsewhere to see if they had any link to the terrorist attack on the Dubrovka theater. Khamzaev, a respected Chechen attorney living in Moscow, himself detained and questioned by police during the sweep, who has offered free legal services to the former hostages, has been busy defending Chechens wrongfully detained in Moscow and elsewhere. (...) While discrimination against Chechens has galvanized the human rights groups attempting to uphold the Russian Constitution and defend their rights, the horror of the terrorism in the center of Moscow has prompted other groups to call for harsher security measures and the return of the death penalty(...)

11/11/02 - President pushes political process in Chechnya - RFE/RL

(...) President Putin said he had approved an initiative to "accelerate a referendum on the adoption of a new constitution" for the republic, (...). Until two months ago, Russian and Chechen officials had advocated holding the referendum before the end of 2002 or in early

2003, but Russian presidential aide Sergei Yastrzhembskii recently suggested it be held simultaneously with State Duma elections in December 2003. (...) President Putin also said the political process for resolving the conflict in Chechnya must be detached from the ongoing campaign against "terrorism." He said he understands that the political process must be reenergized and that political power in the republic must be transferred to Chechens as soon as possible. Putin said that during the 1990s the republic became a victim of international terrorism and that he hopes "Chechens will soon take upon themselves the entire burden of combating banditry." (...) In the same comments, President Putin harshly attacked Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov.

Putin said that until recently the Kremlin had maintained secret contacts with Maskhadov's administration and that the Chechen president had steadfastly evaded any political compromise with Russia.(...)

11/19/2002 - Two red cross employees released, but two other aid workers still missing - RFE/RL

Two employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) who had been abducted last week were released unharmed in a police operation on 17 November (...) Unidentified, masked, and armed men kidnapped the workers near Grozny, letting two other staff go free (...). Alexander Panov and Moussa Satushiev, truck drivers based in Nalchik, were travelling in a convoy of three of the organization's vehicles heading back to Ingushetia after delivering humanitarian aid in the Chechen capital. An official from the Chechen Military Prosecutor's Office said on 15 November that militants loyal to field commander Ali Paizullaev were believed to have carried out the kidnapping. (...)

11/19/2002 - Authorities reject chechen plea in Kazakhstan - RFE/RL

The Kazakh Foreign Ministry's press service initially refused to comment on an open letter addressed to President Nursultan Nazarbaev by some 300 Chechen families in Ingushetia appealing for temporary refuge in Kazakhstan, (...). At the

opening of the Assembly of Peoples, the president implicitly rejected the refugees' claims, stating the appeal, circulated on news wires, was not filed with the Kazakh leadership and that any such sudden influx of refugees would be made "only in consultation with Russia." (...). A Foreign Ministry official said if any applications were made for entry, they would likely be refused, commenting that "Chechnya is Russia's internal affair," (...)

11/27/2002 - Supplies running out for Chechen refugees - RFE/RL

United Nations officials fear their supplies through the World Food Program (WFP) will run out before January 2003 (...). "The situation in the internally displaced-persons camps is deteriorating day by day" (...).

The UN is appealing for \$33.7 million from international donors to provide food and other assistance for civilians in Chechnya and neighboring Russian republics in 2003. The situation in refugee camps housing 20,000 to 25,000 Chechens in neighboring Ingushetia has worsened due to the increased presence of Russian forces since Chechen separatists seized a Moscow theater with hundreds inside last month. (...)

11/27/2002 - Duma commission urges state of emergency for chechnya - RFE/RL

(...) According to the commission's members, a state of emergency would "promote the legal protection of the civilian population and also eliminate ambiguity in the rights and obligations of Russia servicemen located in the conflict zone," (...).

In addition, the commission members urged the government to draw up in short order "a comprehensive state conception for political settlement and national agreement" in Chechnya and to set up a special agency that would be given power over all of the republic's state institutions, including the law-enforcement organs and the military. (...)

The commission recommended that the Duma on 18 December debate possible measures by the federal government to achieve a political settlement in Chechnya, protect human rights in the republic, and rebuild its economy and social sphere.

11/27/2002 - Russian human rights activists slam Putin's rejection of Chechen peace talks - RFE/RL

Members of the committee to organize an international conference on ending the war in Chechnya, including human rights activists Sergei Kovalev and Lev Ponamarev, have written to President Putin criticizing his 10 November statement that he will not hold peace talks with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and his proposal to hold a referendum on a new constitution in Chechnya early in 2003 (...). They point out that international law precludes holding a referendum on a territory at war, and that doing so would only exacerbate tensions. They also reason that peace talks should be held with those persons who have the authority to order a cease-fire and ensure it is observed, rather than those who are considered more pleasant negotiating partners. (...)

NAGORNO KARABAKH / HAUT KARABAKH

11/06/02 - Azeri authorities prepare to war - PanARMENIAN.Net

A large-scale action of gathering funds for the national army is launched in Azerbaijan: money is being accumulated on the account of the Fund for assistance to armed forces created by order of President Heydar Aliyev. Analysts consider the formation of such a fund as evidence of authorities' preparation to military solution of the Karabakh problem. And this script of developments may just become Aliyev's best PR-step not long before presidential elections in the country, the newspaper article notes.

11/06/02 - Turkish parliamentary elections winner party leader promised contribution to Baku in solving Karabakh conflict - PanARMENIAN.Net

Leader of Justice and Development party, which has won the absolute majority of votes at the parliamentary elections in Turkey, Rajab Erdogan assured of

his readiness to contribute to Azerbaijan in order to "fairly" solve the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. He made this statement in telephone conversation with Azeri President Heydar Aliyev, who congratulated him on the victory. Erdogan also expressed readiness to undertake all necessary steps to further develop relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

11/08/02 - Karabakh crime reported down in first nine months of 2002 - Arminfo

Owing to organizational, rapid and preventive measures, the situation in the Nagorny Karabakh Republic NKR is under control, the NKR deputy interior minister, Arshavir Garamyan, has told a session of the NKR Interior Ministry. He said that the number of crimes registered in the first nine months of this year was 70 cases fewer, or down 13.9 per cent, compared to the same period last year. The number of crimes solved by the criminal investigation department fell by 24.1 per cent, or 95 cases, compared to the same period last year. The number of serious crimes for the said period fell by 37.7 per cent, or 23 cases, and the number of premeditated crimes, inflicting bodily harm, hooliganism and robbery also fell considerably. A total 11.5t of drug-related plants were destroyed as part of the Konoplya hemp rapid preventive operation. Ninety-two pieces of illegal weapons and a large number of cartridges were seized. Thirty-one cases of economic crimes and one case of embezzlement in large amounts were also registered in the first nine months of this year.

11/21/02 - Aliev, Kocharian Rule Out Karabakh Deal Before 2003 Polls

The presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan admitted late Thursday that a long-awaited breakthrough in the stalled Nagorno-Karabakh peace process is highly unlikely before next year's presidential elections in their countries. Presidents Robert Kocharian and Heydar Aliyev made the statement after yet another face-to-face meeting held in Prague on the sidelines of a NATO summit.

As usual, very few details of the direct negotiations were available.

Kocharian said they were productive but again would not go into details. Aliyev similarly noted that such contacts facilitate the protracted search for peace.

Kocharian went straight into talks with his 79-year-old Azerbaijani counterpart on his arrival in the Czech capital -- before actually attending the summit's sessions. After speaking one on one for about an hour, the two men were joined by the U.S., Russian and French co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian, accompanying Kocharian, said that although they have been discussing various peace options, the Armenian side will never agree to Karabakh's return under Azerbaijani rule.

Both Aliyev and Kocharian are facing reelection next year and are therefore unlikely to cut peace deals requiring unpopular mutual concessions. This reality was on Thursday acknowledged by the U.S. ambassador to Armenia, John Ordway. But he stressed that continued Armenian-Azerbaijani dialogue is vital for the future of the peace process.

"I think that it is still possible and desirable for the presidents to continue this process because they can do a lot of work to accelerate prospects for the settlement after the elections," Ordway told a news conference in Yerevan.

Meanwhile, reports from Baku said on Wednesday that Azerbaijan has harshly criticized French officials for meeting with the president of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic, Arkady Ghukasian, during his visit to Paris this week. The charge d'affaires at the French embassy in Azerbaijan, Thibault Fourriere, was summoned afternoon to a meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Khalaf Khalafov and handed a note of protest.

"The deputy minister informed the French side of Azerbaijan's belief that such meetings in future would be unacceptable," the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

INGUSHETIA / INGOUCHIE

11/18/02 - Explosions in Ingushetia - RFE/RL

Four people were killed and nine injured on 14 November when a suspect exploded a hand grenade as police and security officials tried to arrest suspected Chechen militants at a bus station in Ingushetia's Malgobek Raion, Interfax reported. On 17 November, the Spartak Stadium in the North Ossetian capital Vladikavkaz was damaged by two explosions one hour after the end of a soccer match between a local team and one from Volgograd, Interfax reported. No one was injured in those blasts.

KRASNODAR REGION / REGION DE KRASNODAR

11/11/02 - Armenian church in Russia damaged by blast - RFE/RL

An explosion rocked the Armenian church in the southern Russian city of Krasnodar early on Friday (...). (...) The blast was caused by an unknown explosive device and seriously damaged the church door. No one was hurt in what is called a "terrorist attack" aimed at further intimidating the Krasnodar Krai's large Armenian community. (...) Local police refused to open a criminal case into the incident after concluding that it most probably resulted from an accidental explosion of a fire-cracker. (...) Krasnodar has been the scene of a series of violent anti-Armenian incidents for much of this year, which local Armenian widely blame on the regional authorities led by Governor Aleksandr Tkachov. Visiting Yerevan with a top Kremlin official late last month, Tkachov assured President Robert Kocharian and other Armenian leaders that he has put an end to such attacks.

11/14/02 - Court hearings of case of Armenian graves pogrom in Krasnodar postponed - PanARMENIAN.Net

It has already been the second time when the court hearing of the case on the pogrom of the Armenian graves in the Krasnodar Slavonic graveyard is postponed. (...) The

first postponement of the hearing was due to psychiatric examination of one of the accused and the second postponement was because of the absence of the barrister.

Nine young people accused of outrage against dead bodies and burial places are before the bar. Seven of them gave written undertaking not to leave the place and the two are in the isolation ward. It should be reminded that April 17, a group of young people destroyed tombstones of over 30 graves, most of which belonged to citizens with Armenian nationality.

11/20/2002 - U.S. officials study plight of Meskhetian Turks - RFE/RL

The Meskhetians, a Turkic Muslim minority people once relocated from Uzbekistan and other parts of the former USSR, are suffering persecution at the hands of a local governor who continues to refuse them citizenship and other basic civil rights in defiance of the Russian Constitution, human rights monitors say. Vadim Karastelyev, head of the local Novorossiisk Human Rights Committee, says some 13,000 Meskhetians have been forced off their land and denied social services due to lack of official documentation, and face deportation. Russian media reports claiming an agreement was already reached to grant the Meskhetians refugee status and transport them to America are exaggerated, Karastelyev told "(Un)Civil Societies," saying the U.S. delegation was merely studying various options to handle the population in crisis.

JAVAKHK / JAVAKHK

11/07/02 - Armenians, Georgians clash in Akhaltsikha - ArmenPress

A-Info news agency, based in the southern Georgian region of Javakheti with predominantly Armenian population, reported that local criminal groupings provoked another clash with Armenian youths November 1.

The agency said the local police, composed of ethnic Georgians, did not make any attempt to prevent the clash. Though local authorities say the clash was triggered by a

routine cause, independent experts say the clashes are being provoked with the aim of diverting the public's attention from the main reason.

The agency claimed that local Georgian criminal groupings are instructed to create an atmosphere that would disrupt joint efforts of local Armenians to seek improvement of their dire social conditions. In the recent years the Armenian population in Javakheti reduced by 20 percent. People left it being no longer able to endure the severe hardships, which are created by Georgian authorities.

11/14/02 - Georgian Authorities Responsible for Javakhk - Asbarez online

According to the director of International Conflict Studies Georgi Khutsiashvili, the current socio-economic instability of Javakhk continues to trouble the local population. Khutsiashvili was speaking at a conference of three Caucasus republics, organized by the Fridrikh Nauman Foundation; the conference is presently underway in Yerevan.

Khutsiashvili stated that his views were backed by several sociological polls conducted in Georgia to examine human right violations of minorities residing in Georgia.

Almost 90 percent of Javakhk's problems are of economic origin, stressed the professor, adding that the Russian Military base of Akhalkalak contributes to regional instability.

The withdrawal of the base in 2004, he stressed, would benefit all.

Responding to a Yerkir daily's reporter who commented that the Military base employs thousands of ethnic Armenians, thus ensures their livelihood, Khutsiashvili commented that Georgian authorities should develop a socio-economic policy for Javakhk in order to create jobs for the population. "Unfortunately the Georgian Government has failed to do so," he concluded.

11/20/02 - Georgian Minister for Special Assignments Malkhaz Kakabadze and OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities Rolf Ekeus discussed the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities at a meeting today, Kavkasia-Press was told at the Ministry of Special Assignments. - Kavkasia-Press news agency

Ekeus arrived in Georgia two days ago. The main topics of his meetings with the country's leadership have been the improvement of social and political conditions of Armenians living in Samtkhe-Javakheti and the repatriation of Meskhetian Turks.

At the meeting between Kakabadze and Ekeus, the sides reviewed the situation in Abkhazia in terms of the protection of ethnic minorities, placing special focus on the use of the Georgian language as a language of instruction in secondary schools in Gali District and the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

11/22/02 - Georgia's Armenian community protests exclusion from development forum - RFE/RL

Virk, a political party representing the predominantly Armenian population of Georgia's southern region of Javakheti, released a statement on 20 November protesting the failure to invite its representatives to a conference held in Tbilisi the previous day on development programs for the region, the A1+ news agency reported on 21 November. The conference was jointly organized by the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities and the UN Development Program. The Virk statement argued that attempts by the Georgian authorities to address the serious social and economic problems of Javakheti without consulting the local population only compound tension and mistrust. It pointed out that "integration is not synonymous with assimilation, nor is autonomy the same as secession." It deplored the fact that Armenians, who constitute the majority of the region's population, are not adequately represented in local government and reaffirms its members' readiness to operate within the Georgian legal-constitutional framework and participate in the search for solutions to the problems facing Javakheti.

11/25/02 - Javakhk Opposes Georgia NATO Membership - Noyan-Tapan

During an interview with "Sahat 24" newspaper, the leader of the "Javakhk" National Movement Norik Garabedian announced that the well

being of the local population should be considered when speaking of the closure of the Russian Military base in Akhalkalak. He noted that approximately 3,000 residents are employed as a result of the base; they would, therefore, become unemployed. "Who is to take responsibility for our security once the base is closed; considering that Turkey is a NATO member, and Georgia is seeking desperately to gain membership--who will give us assurances that Turkey would not enter the area?" asked Garabedian.

He noted that the Turks have twice now massacred Armenians, and "Armenians will not allow it again; that is only possible with the presence [protection] of Russia in the area" he said. He announced that the population of Javakhs opposes Georgia's membership in NATO and the closure of the Russian military base there.

DOCUMENTS

11/14/02 - Azerbaijan Civil Society and Justice locked by the Aliyev System - FIDH (Fédération internationale des Ligues des droits de l'Homme)- Press Release

Publishing of an International Mission of Judicial Observation report on the current trial of three political prisoners

Although President Aliyev restored a certain amount of political stability in the mid-nineties, he very soon blocked the process of democratisation in order to reinforce his own power.

The FIDH international mission, that went to Baku (Azerbaijan) from 4 to 9 July 2002, observed that Mr. Aliyev implemented a strategy to neutralise any form of social or political opposition, including the use of violence. Police repression of the social protest movement in Nardaran on June 3 last is a clear example. In order to silence the villagers who had social requests, police fired into the crowd, killing one person and they arrested 18 demonstrators and leaders of local opposition who were subsequently beaten up. To justify their acts, the authorities present these social movements as political movements

of Islamic fundamentalists manipulated by Iran.

Various methods are used by the authorities in order to hold on to power at any price. These include :

electoral and legislative fraud as recently happened with the referendum on August 24. The date for the referendum was set by presidential decree only months before it was held, without prior consultation with the parliament ; harassment of NGOs and the media ; pressure on opposition leaders (arrests and arbitrary detentions, legal harassment, arbitrary redundancies, ban on demonstrations and meetings, difficulties to register for opposition parties, raids on opposition party offices). At the beginning of October over a dozen members of the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan and the Musavat Party were arrested and condemned to several days detention. They were finally released on October 5 after pressure from the United States.

This has inevitably led to a deterioration in the human rights situation.

The president has given many guarantees in the field of international and regional human rights protection (ratification of the main human rights instruments, adoption of legislation monitored by experts from the Council of Europe, successive waves of releases of prisoners...). Yet these guarantees are only partial and are even used as an alibi to conceal the lack of independence of the judiciary as well as egregious violations of fundamental freedoms.

The case of the new trial of three political prisoners, Messrs. Gamidov, Gumbatov and Gaziyeu, is a clear example of this. Three prisoners considered as political prisoners by the Council of Europe ; have been granted a new trial thanks to the pressure from this institution of which Azerbaijan is a member since 2001. But the conditions of these trials do not guarantee the right to a fair and impartial trial. These trials are held in the prison where the prisoners are detained and the international mission found that the following violations were being committed : absence of presumption of

innocence, absence of public hearings, violations of defence rights and degrading detention conditions. The authorities still refuse to consider them as political prisoners. These trials which began in May 2002, are more like a legal masquerade, and the verdict is highly predictable. In September, during the Parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, the President's son ; Mr. Ilham Aliyev, using the international situation to counter criticism, said these prisoners were terrorists.

Press contact : Julianne Falloux : 33-1 43 55 2518

INFORMATION

Our E-Mail :
Notre E-Mail :
htchoboiancovcas@compuserve.com

COVCAS CENTER FOR LAW & CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Maison B. Albrecht
14, place Grandclément
69100 Villeurbanne

Tél : 33 (0)6-60-69-42-97 – Fax : 33 (0)4-78-31-74-01

Vous avez dû constater que « *Covcas Bulletin* » a cessé de paraître depuis le n°2 du volume 11 de Mars-Avril 2002.

Le Centre Covcas pour la résolution des Conflits a mis à profit cette période pour réorganiser sa publication. Celle-ci reprendra avec un rythme mensuel dès Décembre 2002 et couvrira les informations du mois précédent.

Dès Décembre donc, nous reprenons ce service d'informations sur le Caucase et la Transcaucasie, destiné aux organisations internationales, aux ONG et aux défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme et des valeurs démocratiques dans la région.

Hilda TCHOBOIAN

You probably noticed that « *Covcas Bulletin* » stopped coming out since the 2002 March-April issue, volume 11.

We inform you that meanwhile, the « *Covcas Center* » reorganized its publication. And so, « *Covcas Bulletin* » will come out again, at a monthly rate, from 2002 December on, and will cover the news of the previous month.

Therefore, from December onwards, our information service will resume. It will always deal with the Caucasus and TransCaucasus for the purpose of International Organisations, NGOs and defenders of Human Rights in the region.

Hilda TCHOBOIAN